8 Moments that Matter
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first look
Discovering Austin
Rachel Frei ’19 watches as the sunlight reflects off the rippling water of Lady Bird Lake. Running brings out the vividness of nature, she says, which she notices all around Austin. Most days, the Biology Pre-Med major runs up to 10 miles before her first class as a member of the women’s cross country team at St. Edward’s University.

“One of my favorite things to see is the different artwork around town and the diverse culture of Austin,” Frei says. “It’s like a hidden journey I’m taking with my teammates when I’m running around Lady Bird Lake, the East Side and downtown.”

Frei, a San Antonio native, says she feels embraced by Austin as a runner. The city gives her opportunities to switch up her running routine that keep her mind active and her body challenged by different terrains.

“I feel like I’m getting more out of Austin because I get to see it in a way other people don’t,” Frei says. “I get to see up close the stages of construction and the progress of the city.”
Science Lets You Fly

How do students go from St. Edward’s to Yale? For Amy Ontai ’17, it included a science-rapping web series, soil ecology research and serving the homeless.

BY STACIA HERNSTROM MLA ’05
PHOTOGRAPHY BY BOB HANDELMAN
GIVE AMY ONTAI ‘17 the length of a sitcom and she’ll rap, play an original song on the ukulele, nail a British accent — and easily explain genetic sequencing and the structure of DNA. Those are among the talents she brought to Fly Sci with Ms. Ontai, a show she created last year for her senior thesis. A Biology major and Education minor, Ontai often found herself discouraged during her student-teaching semesters that kids found science esoteric, difficult and (worst of all) boring.

“Science should be fun and interactive,” she says. “I wanted to make a show like Bill Nye, the Science Guy, which I loved as a kid, but instead of Bill Nye, what if it was me?”

With guidance from a seventh-grade mentor teacher at Austin’s Covington Middle School, she wrote, filmed and produced two full episodes and a trailer using equipment from the Munday Library, along with the GarageBand and iMovie apps. She presented the first episode at the Austin Area STEM Conference, spearheaded by Associate Professor of Secondary Education Steven Fletcher, and completed the second the following semester.

“I wanted to show kids that science is not just really smart people in lab coats,” she says. “It can sometimes seem so arcane, and correcting that misunderstanding was a major goal of mine.”

Ontai loved student-teaching in local schools but, after being mistaken for a middle-schooler during one of her teaching semesters, decided to shift her focus to influencing public education through research and policy. As a junior, she became part of McNair Scholars at St. Edward’s, which supports minority groups typically underrepresented in doctoral programs. She spent a summer studying soil ecology in areas dominated by ashe juniper trees at the university’s Wild Basin Creative Research Center under the guidance of Assistant Professor of Biology Teresa Bilinski. She also assisted professors in molecular biology classes and freshman biology labs and presented at the Annual Biomedical Research Conference for Minority Students in Tampa, Florida.

“Through McNair, I saw how much diversity actually benefits research as a whole,” says Ontai, a California native born to Hawaiian parents who moved to Plainview when she was 3 years old. “If you diversify the backgrounds of people asking questions, you diversify the answers to those questions.”

The opportunities that McNair offered for research, presenting and finding mentors helped Ontai “learn how to navigate the PhD process as a minority woman, especially in STEM.” She landed a place in Yale University’s five-year PhD program in Microbiology. “If you want to do something really big in science education, a PhD is the way to open doors,” she says. “You can make change happen on a larger scale.”

Even with her impeccable résumé, Ontai says she still occasionally feels like an imposter at Yale (and not just because she didn’t own a winter coat until she bought one the moment she found out she had been accepted). “It’s tough. There are a lot of people around me who are smarter and more well-read than I am,” she says. “But one of the most important things my college experience taught me is that I do belong here. It helped me realize that being a minority woman at Yale is not only a great accomplishment for me but for minority women in STEM everywhere.”

Being comfortable in her own skin — and thankful for her talents — is a theme reinforced by her student-assistant job in Campus Ministry. “It was my second home and one of my biggest sources of encouragement,” says Ontai. By volunteering at a halfway house for the homeless in Phoenix, Arizona, through Campus Ministry’s Spring Break Experience program and helping to deliver Thanksgiving turkeys to needy Austin families, she came to more fully recognize “the dignity of every single person. You can never know what’s really happening in someone’s life,” she says, “but when you act with empathy for other people’s struggles, you begin to see their humanity, not to mention your own.”

Ontai found herself the recipient of such empathy when she learned of her acceptance to Yale — Campus Ministry’s Administrative Secretary Medina Bills and Associate Director Liza Manjarrez were two of the first people she told. “I ran into Liza’s office and we started screaming and jumping up and down,” she says. “And Father Peter [Walsh, CSC, who directs Campus Ministry but once worked at Yale’s Saint Thomas More Catholic Chapel and Center] still sends me advice on where to get good pizza and lobster rolls in New Haven.”

That kind of support, Ontai says, is quintessentially St. Edward’s — and pretty fly indeed.
Cheryl O’Connor MBA ’18 and Ryan Cunningham ’21 find out if their startup idea is viable.

3 Day Startup
In September 2017, 43 students from St. Edward’s participated in 3 Day Startup, a nonprofit entrepreneurial boot camp. Hosted at St. Edward’s by The Bill Munday School of Business, 3 Day Startup has helped students across six continents launch more than 130 companies by activating their entrepreneurial potential through experiential education.

ENERGY IS EVERYWHERE, from the steam rising from your coffee cup to your footsteps walking to get that coffee. But how do you harness energy that is otherwise wasted, like the energy created by your footsteps, and use it to power a sports arena? Cheryl O’Connor MBA ’18 and her team of three undergraduate students participated in 3 Day Startup to determine if the idea behind O’Connor’s startup (Energy Everywhere) was viable.

You began with the idea of collecting energy from vibrations created by cars driving on the freeway. How did your idea evolve when meeting with Austin-based business leaders? The team discussed how implementing the technology into roads would be too complex. We decided that high-foot-traffic commercial spaces are ideal venues to test and scale a product. Shelley Delayne, founder of Orange Coworking, reinforced our ideas and helped us decide to test in a sports arena. She also connected me with other Austin business leaders who have experience in this specific industry, as well as a patent attorney who can help me investigate whether similar products exist.

The team conducted market research on South Congress Avenue. Why did you choose this location? This area of Austin offers both high foot traffic and a diverse cross-section of people — socioeconomics, age and race. We wanted to know if people base their buying decisions on a company’s commitment to the environment, or whether renewable energy makes an impact on consumer choices. The city offers an ideal mix of people to test whether renewable energy options are viable in this market before we invest further.

What did it feel like to pitch your idea to a panel of successful entrepreneurs? It was nerve-wracking. But positive comments from mentors took away the intimidation factor. It was impactful to hear that I should pursue the idea, especially from influential people in Austin’s startup scene. In particular, Gordon Daugherty, managing director at Capital Factory, asked questions that revealed I hadn’t fully explained a key solution the product offers. This kind of feedback was critical.

The Energy of Austin
The city serves as a living laboratory for business students.

BY BARBARA JOHNSON

AUSTIN CONNECTION
Going Places
Students at St. Edward’s are smart, ambitious and on the move.

BY STACIA HERNSTROM MLA ’05

Kurterry Singleton ’18
Accounting

Why he is a student to watch: With two internships at accounting giant KPMG on his résumé and a third in the works, Singleton flew to Hollywood last summer as one of only 60 students selected for the company’s Future Diversity Leaders Conference. “KPMG believes that the only way to be the best firm is to hire the best people from all backgrounds and cultures. I know I can truly be myself there,” he says. “That’s exactly how I feel at St. Edward’s, too.”

What he is doing: He is finishing up a BBA and will return to the hilltop in the fall for one more year to complete a master’s in Accounting through the university’s five-year BBA/MACT dual-degree program. He is also part of the Accounting Club and the National Association of Black Accountants.

Beyond the numbers: Singleton has cleaned up a local park, tended a community garden and repaired houses for the elderly as a volunteer and team leader in Campus Ministry’s S.E.R.V.E. 1 Day program. As part of a Service Break Experience trip, he spent a week helping the poor and homeless at nonprofits in Denver, Colorado. “My trip showed me that sometimes people just want you to listen to their story and show them you care,” he says. “They want to spend time with someone who recognizes that they are human beings.”

Alma Baker ’18
Social Work

Why she is a student to watch: Baker is trilingual — she speaks English, Hungarian and Spanish. In 2016, she taught English to children in Romania with funding from a Summer Academic Excellence Award from St. Edward’s. Last summer, she studied in Chile through a Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship from the U.S. Department of State.

On poverty and social justice: Universidad Adolfo Ibáñez, where Baker studied, is one of the most prestigious and affluent in Chile. But just a couple of miles away is “a completely different reality,” she says, where people live in illegal shantytowns without access to schools or hospitals. “Seeing the disparity has made me ready to work harder than ever to advocate for social change.”

“My [Service Break Experience] trip showed me that sometimes people just want you to listen to their story and show them you care.”

Nick Espenan ’18
Communication

Why he is a student to watch: Espenan has played on the club rugby team since his freshman year (and captained the team his sophomore year). He has welcomed prospective students as part of Hilltop Hospitality and is a student orientation coordinator. He completed a marketing internship with Emmis Communications and worked as media director for the Laity Lodge Family Camp. Now, he is a videographer for the Hilltop Views student newspaper.

On choosing a major: As a freshman, Espenan had no idea what to major in before he walked into Introduction to Communication with Associate Professor Teri Varner. “She explained how with a comm degree you can do just about anything,” he says. “You learn adaptable skills like problem-solving, thinking from different angles, and writing and speaking, so you can adapt to any situation.”
The Courage to Try
What happens when a student spends her first three years on the hilltop taking risks?

BY ERICA QUIROZ

JOVAHANA AVILA ’19 set a goal her freshman year: to land an internship at the Texas State Capitol.

That summer, she joined the office of State Rep. Eddie Rodriguez, D-Austin, as a legislative intern. The experience confirmed her choice to pursue a Political Science and Writing and Rhetoric double major. She saw it as a way to connect people to opportunities, a struggle Avila related to as a first-generation Mexican-American student at St. Edward’s University.

“Political science helps me understand the world around me, how it works and how to use my role to help others,” says Avila, who returned to Rodriguez’s office last spring as a legislative aide.

“Education is both my key and my tool for breaking the cycle and moving my family forward.”

Learning about the impact political science can have gave Avila an “edge-of-my-seat feeling,” she says, and she’s continued to feel that way in her classes and internships with the League of Women Voters of Texas; tutors local students as a volunteer at Con Mi Hermana, a sister program under the education nonprofit Con Mi MADRE; and has participated in three Campus Ministry service trips.

“My experiences have taught me to strive for the best version of myself, to never stop learning and to throw myself into every opportunity,” Avila says. “Every day there are challenges, and I still work on overcoming my fear of taking chances, but I’d rather fail than not try at all.”

Watch the video www.stedwards.edu/myhilltop

Avila is a supervisor at Meadows Coffeehouse, and her morning duties include prepping drinks such as the ever-popular Turbo.

As the president of the Latino Student Leaders Organization, Avila stays connected via the group’s Facebook page.

An internship with the League of Women Voters of Texas helps her gain real-world experience working with voters from minority populations.
Avila uses some of her downtime between classes to catch up with friends.

Avila heads to her Writing in the Digital Age class, where she hones the skills she applies as a journalist for the student newspaper.

Avila chats with a classmate about using the audio-production software Audacity for an assignment.

Avila follows along as Professor of Political Science Brian W. Smith explains how the chi-square test of statistical significance can be used in political science.

As a resident assistant in Jacques Dujarié Hall, Avila plans a late-night pancake breakfast to help students socialize (and relax).

Time is hard to find during the day, so Avila uses late nights to catch up on her studying.
LAST SUMMER, COLLEGE students Charlotte Cotter and Willa Mei Kurland, both Chinese adoptees who grew up in American families, decided to search for their birth families. The women posted about their quest on Chinese social media, and within 24 hours Kurland's foster mother reached out, overjoyed. Meanwhile, a Chinese reporter dug through records at the hospital where Cotter was born and identified her birth parents.

But both women's stories turned out to be complicated. Kurland's foster mother, who found Kurland on her doorstep, had wanted to adopt the baby herself. But the population-control authorities forbade the adoption because the woman already had two sons. After being threatened with legal action, she relinquished the baby the day before Kurland's American parents — who knew nothing of the controversy — arrived to adopt her. Cotter’s birth parents said they made arrangements through an intermediary for a specific childless couple to adopt her, but a passerby assumed she’d been abandoned and took her to the police station instead.

Cotter’s and Kurland's journeys are among the nearly 100 oral histories collected by Associate Professor of Journalism and Digital Media Jena Heath for Our China Stories, a digital archive of personal narratives from the Chinese adoption community. China's one-child policy, implemented in 1980 and relaxed in late 2015, gave rise to the country’s international adoption program. But as Heath found when she adopted her daughter, Caroline, from China in 2008, the details of the adoptee's life before adoption are often difficult to confirm.

Heath decided to gather the stories of other adoptees so that, as researchers wrestle with questions about the Chinese adoption program, they will have access to first-person narratives from adoptees as well as their families. Her next project is to collaborate with the Munday Library to incorporate Our China Stories into the library’s digital collection.

“We need these voices to be accessible to scholars,” Heath says, “so we can have a better understanding of how people are thinking about their own histories.”
Around Campus

**A MODERN ICON**

Last fall, The Bill Munday School of Business announced the arrival of a Bloomberg Terminal, a sophisticated tool that allows students, particularly those interested in finance, to participate in real-time market events. “Students can simulate hypothetical portfolios and stay ahead of what’s happening to maximize their returns,” says Ali Dadpay, professor of Economics. “The skills required to use this terminal will make students very competitive in their careers and in the marketplace.”

**18 students a semester**

**LET’S GO**

St. Edward’s and the Austin Independent School District have partnered to bring graduated AISD students with disabilities to campus to connect them with their collegiate peers. Leslie Loughmiller, assistant professor of Special Education, became involved with the GO Project four years ago and says 18 students at St. Edward’s participate each semester. “Just as we’re connecting GO Project students with opportunities, our Education majors get the same opportunity to see what students with exceptionalities can achieve and what challenges they face. This gives them first-hand experience they can use in their own classrooms.”

**STUDENT OF THE YEAR**

The Texas chapter of the National Association of Social Workers recognized Margarita Guerrero ’18 for her contributions to her field in October. After taking the American Dilemmas class, which “got me involved in civic engagement and pushed me to do more volunteer service around Austin,” Guerrero applied her learning to Casa Marianella, an emergency homeless shelter in Austin. Later, she worked with Integral Care, a local nonprofit supporting behavioral health and those with developmental disabilities. Additionally, she interned in the Victim Services unit of the Travis County Sheriff’s Office. “I’m speaking with real people now; it’s the real thing,” she says of covering the victim hotline where people receive assistance with crisis intervention.

**HARVEY’S DATA**

On Aug. 25, 2017, with the sky dark and churning, a team of Natural Sciences professors, staff members and students began releasing the first of 13 weather balloons that produced the only source of sounding data (readings from a high altitude) available from Central and Southeast Texas during Hurricane Harvey. The National Weather Service used the data, collected in partnership with the University of Houston, to create forecasts for 33 affected counties (including the Austin and San Antonio areas) and to brief state and local officials.

**MIND YOUR P’S AND Q’S**

How do heritage speakers differ from native speakers in their communication style? (Heritage speakers grow up in homes where a non-English language is spoken. Native speakers learn English from infancy.) That’s the puzzle Emily Bernate, assistant professor of Spanish, is piecing together. Since 2014, Bernate has collected audio interviews and surveys from students at universities in Texas and Mexico to determine how each group uses Spanish verb forms to express politeness. The idea came from listening to her students in class, Bernate says. “What I’ve found is that as contact with English increases, the reliance on verb forms to express politeness decreases. The decrease is slower for women than men because women tend to use verbal politeness strategies as a tool to get what they want.”

“It’s kind of heavy to see the weather models on TV, in part created by the balloons we launched.”

MATTHEW VILLARREAL ’19
Math and Physics Major
From Zimbabwe, Not Dallas
A student rediscovers her roots and develops a passion for fighting injustice.

BY LAUREN LIEBOWITZ

ASK POLITICAL SCIENCE major Gamuchiraiy Mariwana ’18 where she’s from, and she will tell you Dallas. It’s the easiest answer to a casual question. But she moved to the Dallas–Fort Worth metropolis from Zimbabwe when she was in high school, and she has never considered herself anything but Zimbabwean. Still, as a teenager, she didn’t intend to return to Zimbabwe after graduation.

But at St. Edward’s, she cultivated a globally aware perspective and became more socially conscious through a Service Break Experience to Peru, an internship with the Kozmetsky Center of Excellence and classes that explore international relations. That, in turn, made her wonder what she could do to help her country.

“I want to be involved in policy to fight injustice,” she says. “I originally wanted to fix the broken system in America. I could put so much of myself into helping America. But what about the place I come from, that made me who I am? After a lot of self-reflection, I feel like I have to go back. I want to help make Zimbabwe livable for everyone.”

Last summer, supported by a Summer Academic Excellence Award, which funds ambitious research and internship projects by students from St. Edward’s, she returned to Zimbabwe for the first time since her family came to the United States. Her goal was to learn more about traditional Zimbabwean culture and to improve her written Shona (the language she grew up with) in summer classes.

“Ten years from now I would love to be in Zimbabwe working for the Minister of Education,” she says. “The government might have failed the people, but the people haven’t failed themselves. They’re very innovative, and they do a lot with what they have. Zimbabweans are smart, brilliant people, but they have never gotten a chance to showcase their skills to benefit their country — it’s hard to lead when there is no precedent and no opportunities. Having a more holistic educational system that focuses on arts, science, government, literature, crafts and trade would benefit all Zimbabweans and give them space and tools to succeed. That’s what I’m most passionate about.”
THE STATE OF THE UNIVERSITY

President George E. Martin reflects on how the university’s past will guide us in the future.

Our mission will sustain us.

“As our mission is more deeply understood and embedded into our daily endeavors, we are able to reach higher levels of achievement and widen our impact on society.”

This past fall the St. Edward’s University Board of Trustees approved Strategic Plan 2022, which will guide the university’s decisions over the next five years. The plan is a result of a yearlong effort by a strategic planning committee that included faculty, administrators, students, alumni and a member of the board. It is a plan that looks to the future, while remaining committed to the fundamental values that define the character and purpose of St. Edward’s University.

Strategic Plan 2022 builds on the two previous strategic plans created during my term as president of the university. The power of the three plans — their energy, the confidence they instill, the way they resonate with every constituency within the larger university community — comes from their commitment to the fundamental values of our Holy Cross mission.

Strategic Plan 2010 identified the structures and resources that had to be built in order for St. Edward’s to reposition itself, if it was to successfully continue its mission into the 21st century. Throughout the decade of the plan’s existence, the university focused on enrollment growth and the financial stability that accompanied it. Financial stability enabled a dramatic upgrade of both academic and residential facilities, increased funding of student aid and scholarships, the addition of new faculty and new academic programs, and larger budgets for faculty and student research.

Strategic Plan 2015 significantly enlarged the vision of our mission, while returning us to the legacy of our international origins. The plan expanded our horizon, which became global in an effort to prepare our students for their future in a globally integrated world. As a result, our students study in programs in 17 different countries for essentially the same cost as studying in Austin. The foundational experiences provided in these programs have helped our students win 127 national and international academic awards since 2008, including 51 Fulbright awards, a Truman Scholarship and two Erasmus Mundus scholarships. U.S. News & World Report now recognizes St. Edward’s as a leader in international education.

Strategic Plan 2022 further enriches the educational experiences we provide students.

It will integrate curricular and co-curricular programs into complementary and expanding pathways to a student’s career and personal future. It augments global experiential educational opportunities with local internships by integrating university life with the business and civic life of Austin. Finally, it better positions the university to move forward through the obstacles presented by an environment that grows increasingly unfriendly to religiously affiliated, independent, liberal arts institutions of higher education. Essential to the plan’s success is its commitment to innovation, creativity and planning that anticipates change rather than merely reacting to it.

Central to all three plans, their orchestration of our quotidian rhythms and their designs for our long-term future, are our Holy Cross values, the roots of the university. Just as the roots of a tree give it life and nourishment, our mission inspired our creation and our purpose. As roots reach deeper and broader, a tree grows taller, and its canopy wider. As our mission is more deeply understood and embedded into our daily endeavors, we are able to reach higher levels of achievement and widen our impact on society by serving more students with an extended and more relevant range of programs, while both retaining and strengthening the core of our liberal arts education. Strong and healthy roots also enable a tree to withstand unfavorable, even toxic, environmental developments. The strength of our mission is our greatest safeguard against developments in our society that are increasingly hostile to institutions providing spiritually inspired, values-based education.

We at St. Edward’s are particularly blessed. We have been bequeathed a mission by Blessed Basil Moreau, CSC, a mission that is both Catholic and catholic, universal in its purpose and eternal in its vision. It is a mission that commits us to the cause of social justice through education, to the continuous improvement of our society and world, and to bettering the human condition. It is always timely; it is always relevant. Our task is to articulate it to current and future generations, design plans that address changing conditions and zealously implement them.
The Transformative Power of Serving Others

Service at St. Edward’s leads to profound changes — in how students view themselves, the world and the impact they can have on others.

By Lauren Liebowitz and Robyn Ross
Photography by Whitney Devin ’10
SEEKER OF COMMON GROUND

DO THE WORK, CREATE UNDERSTANDING

PATRICE PONCE '18 wants to be a civil lawyer. The Political Science major has gone on four Service Break Experiences (SBE) and is active in Campus Ministry through service and a Bible study group on campus. Her particular area of interest comes from firsthand experience: As an LGBT+ Asian-American woman, she's driven to help others in marginalized communities.

IN HER WORDS:
I feel like on every SBE trip I take, I learn something new, not only about the community I serve but also about myself. Sometimes I feel like I’ve figured it out, but then I go on another trip and get a different perspective of social justice and yourself in general.

I led a group on a trip to Utah, where we worked a lot with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints serving refugees. I think my group came with the idea that they had such different views from us. We put up a wall before we even got to meet them. It wasn't until we started serving with some of the people that we realized none of that stuff even matters. It’s not about getting caught up in the differences. SBE is about getting involved in the work. That’s what’s really important.

I think a lot of people come into the Political Science major with their views already figured out. I know so many people who refuse to be friends with people who don’t agree with them on certain things, and this trip taught me to really put those differences aside.

You never know a person’s life and what they’re going through or how they’ve come to their own moral understanding. The Political Science professors try to instill that in you, that it’s not about your party identification or what you believe; it’s about keeping that separate from your personal life and your relationships with other people. SBE is a chance to live that out.
“I’m going to physical therapy school soon, and I’m going to find a way to help disadvantaged people,” says Kylie Seaman ’17.
The world doesn’t have enough loving and humble people. I want the world to see that there are people who genuinely care,” says Josue Damian-Martinez ’18.

CHAMPION OF EQUALITY
EXPLORE THE WORLD, GAIN PERSPECTIVE

KYLIE SEAMAN ’17 transferred to St. Edward’s in search of a welcoming community where she could balance being a mom with being a student. She has jumped on many opportunities — including two Service Break Experiences (SBE), in which students live simply and serve others for a week or two in locations in the United States and around the world. She’s been inspired to find a way to use her Kinesiology major to make a difference.

IN HER WORDS:
My first SBE brought me to work with Homeboy Industries, which is a program that helps at-risk gang youth. I’m from a really small town where there is nothing like that, and it was interesting seeing this whole different perspective of the world. It was related to what I’d learned the previous semester in my American Dilemmas class, but it’s different to learn about something and then actually see it. Going to Los Angeles made me think about these kids and their lack of access to everything, and I started thinking about how I could help with that in the future. But my second SBE trip, to Peru, was more important to me.

We went to Canto Grande, a district of Lima and one of the poorest in all of Peru. We worked at the relief organization Yancana Huasy, where people help children with special needs, including giving them physical therapy. And that was eye-opening because that was the only place in the entire district of millions of people where special needs children could get physical and occupational therapy. Also, there were things that I take for granted as an athlete and a physical therapy student, like hydrotherapy baths. In the U.S., there’s one in any school with an athletic training gym. In Peru, they were so excited to have just one out of very few in the area. Again, I kept thinking about this lack of access.

I’m going to physical therapy school soon, and I’m going to find a way to help disadvantaged people, whether I go back to Peru or somewhere else.

DISCIPLE OF GOD
LIVE KINDLY, SERVE DAILY

Josue Damian-Martinez ’18 has risen to leadership roles in multiple organizations across campus. He’s been part of S.E.R.V.E. Austin, the Hilltop Welcome Team, Student Government and Campus Ministry. He also volunteers with organizations that focus on youth, such as Breakthrough Central Texas and E4 Youth. It’s all part of his goal to inspire his community, listen to different perspectives, and help others feel understood and valued — his personal idea of service.

IN HIS WORDS:
I was heavily involved in high school, but coming into college that first year was very difficult. There was a lot going on personally, and I was homesick. Then I met Brother Larry Atkinson, [CSC], and it was like a light in the darkness for me. That’s when I started getting involved at St. Edward’s.

My main thing has always been to inspire other people, especially the first-generation Latino community. I had a conversation with a student in CAMP, the College Assistance Migrant Program. She said, ‘I noticed that a lot of the people who are involved don’t look like me, but you and I are very similar, and you’re involved. And it encourages me.’ Even in high school, I noticed that pattern, too. A lot of the Latino kids did look up to me and think, ‘I can do that, too.’

Lately, I’ve been thinking of service as part of my everyday life. I hold these different leadership positions on campus, and that’s how I’m serving the students: coming to an understanding and becoming more knowledgeable about the struggles that other people face. And really taking those struggles in so I can stand in solidarity with people.

I do what I do because I care for people. I don’t do this because I’m building a résumé. I don’t do this because I’m working my way up the ranks. The world doesn’t have enough loving and humble people. I want the world to see that there are people who genuinely care.

As a leader, Brother Larry is an inspiration to me. He’s always on top of his stuff. He’s extroverted, but he knows when to step back. It’s really cool. He also helps me tie what I do back to faith as the foundation. Everything I do, the way that I interact, I make sure that I interact well and kindly with people, because I’m also ultimately a disciple of God. I’m called to serve, and as a servant of God, that’s what I need to do.
**UNEXPECTED ACCOUNTANT**

**SHARE TALENTS, IMPROVE LIVES**

SYDNEY ZUCKER ’18 had only a rudimentary understanding of taxes before taking Professor of Accounting Louise Single’s Income Inequality and Tax Policy Honors class. The class required nearly 40 hours of service with the tax preparation arm of Foundation Communities, a nonprofit in Austin that helps families in need. The experience made her wonder how she could use her Math major to make a difference.

**IN HER WORDS:**
In high school, I did the usual one-off service projects. Professor Single’s class was the first time I had a long-term service goal. I saw this and said to myself, ‘I don’t know anything about taxes; that seems cool.’

The way it worked was this: People came in to get their taxes done, and I helped them figure out what forms they needed. They would then go on to the second stage where they got their taxes prepared. There was a lot of on-the-job learning, and it was super unnerving at first. It was cool because I got to practice a lot of skills I don’t usually get to as a Math major, like customer service. I think in the end I spent more than 40 hours there because they were short-staffed sometimes. Also, they see a lot of deaf clients, and I can communicate in ASL, so I wanted to fill in as often as I could. I’m planning to return for the 2018 tax season, too.

When I thought about ways I could volunteer to help my community, I never would have thought of taxes. That made me think about my major, too. If good tax advice can help people, what can I do? I really like pure theoretical math, but I feel like it could be more useful. For instance, I read about a mathematician who’s using hyperbolic geometry to be an expert witness in gerrymandering cases. I want to do something like that.

**ADVOCATE FOR CHANGE**

**UNDERSTAND THE ISSUES, MAKE CONNECTIONS**

AARON KENNARD ’18 is focused on making the college experience better for his fellow students. As a member of the Transitional Experiences Council, the Communication major helps students adjust to college. But his greatest passion is his work with the campus chapter of It’s On Us, which raises awareness about sexual assault among college students.

**IN HIS WORDS:**
My first semester freshman year, I took a rhetoric class where I wrote a paper about sexual assault. I didn’t really know a lot about sexual assault, especially in terms of Title IX and the other laws that pertain to sexual assault and sexual violence. But this was an opportunity to explore it, and through exploring, I realized that sexual assault awareness and education is what I’m passionate about and what I want to do.

I think I was most surprised by how pervasive it is. Sexual assault touches almost every single person’s life, and that’s a really sobering thought. I mean, one in five women experiences some sort of sexual violence while in college, and then it’s one in 16 men. It’s affected the lives of people I know and love. So I joined It’s On Us. We have an action week in the fall with events every single day. We bring in people who are working to prevent sexual assault off campus, and they talk about the state of sexual assault laws in Texas. We have people write messages of support for survivors and tie those messages to the Wishing Tree. And in the spring we put on Take Back the Night. It’s making a difference — people have started really talking about sexual assault here, and I’ve seen that a lot of people have a better understanding of what consent is.

And really it is on us. It’s on every single person, not just higher education or law enforcement, to work to end the epidemic. It’s influenced and governed by big institutions, but culture is created by the people. And so it is our responsibility, and every single person can do something — whether that’s big or small — to change it.

“When I thought about ways I could volunteer to help my community, I never would have thought of taxes. That made me think about my major, too,” says Sydney Zucker ’18.
“So it is our responsibility, and every single person can do something — whether that’s big or small — to change the culture around sexual assault,” says Aaron Kennard ’18.
As a sophomore at St. Edward’s, Russell Baltera ’03, DMBA ’07 was still struggling with the amount of free time he had in college. Left to his own devices, he kept getting into trouble. Baltera eventually landed in the Dean of Students office for a disciplinary meeting with then-Dean Lisa Kirkpatrick. Kirkpatrick could see Baltera’s potential; he just needed structure and coaching. Instead of suspending him, she hired him to work in her office. There, he met students who were involved in campus organizations, and he became a student orientation leader. Baltera went on to earn a master’s in Digital Media Management from St. Edward’s and now works for a record label in New York City.

“My service to students is about helping them identify moments for reflection and develop into whole, integrated, healthy people,” Kirkpatrick says. “The student is in charge of his or her life, but I’m walking alongside them, helping them discover their passion.”

Now Kirkpatrick continues that journey as the university’s vice president for Student Affairs. Since she arrived at St. Edward’s 23 years ago, Kirkpatrick has also served as the director of two residence halls, assistant director of Residence Life, assistant director of Student Life, dean of students, Title IX coordinator and associate vice president for Student Affairs. In each position, she’s been motivated by the spirit of service and humility she sees modeled by the Congregation of Holy Cross.

“As Holy Cross educators, we’re not teaching you what to think; we’re teaching you how to think,” she says. “We’re helping you make meaning that makes sense for you and compels you to be of service to the world.”

Kirkpatrick finds her own fulfillment in helping students connect with their purpose.

“Being part of an organization where we lead with soul, and we are grounded in a very spiritual mission, is my reward,” she says. “Even those difficult decisions we sometimes have to make, we make from a space of authenticity and love. For me, to come to work every day and be a part of something greater than myself that is in service of the student — that is my nourishment.”

For more than two decades, Lisa Kirkpatrick has exemplified the university’s mission.
The first time Cole Harper ‘10 visited St. Joseph Hall, his knock was answered by Brother Stephen Walsh, CSC, ’62. Walsh, who cut an imposing figure, invited Harper inside, and Harper sat straight in his chair and spoke in the formal tone he assumed was necessary for interacting with the Holy Cross Brothers.

Twelve years later, after living in Moreau House, studying literature with Brother George Klawitter, CSC, taking swimming from Brother Donard Steffes, CSC, and carving a set of wooden dominoes with Brother Edwin Reggio, CSC, Harper smiles at the memory. “The brothers showed me that spirituality is in service and in working with others wherever the need is,” Harper says.

That discovery helped draw Cole’s younger brother, Matisen Harper ‘15, to St. Edward’s.

Growing up Catholic, the Harpers perceived spirituality as a solemn and structured aspect of life, an experience confined to Mass, confession or memorized prayer. But, Cole says, “for the brothers, it’s all about focusing on someone else.”

Sometimes this meant participating in a structured activity, like the weekly Egg Ministry, where the Harpers joined Holy Cross Brothers in feeding the homeless. Other times, it meant simply paying attention to the needs of people in their daily lives. When Matisen overheard a brother express confusion about his email account, he offered to troubleshoot. When he learned that the brothers’ archival materials needed to be moved from the province center to the Munday Library, he showed up to help.

It’s an approach to service the Harpers saw modeled by Brother Larry Atkinson, CSC, ’70, assistant director of Campus Ministry.

“The role of a brother is somewhat behind the scenes,” Atkinson says. “It’s helping out where you are called, and thinking of others first. It’s a very servant-leadership type of model. That’s what’s been modeled for me — you don’t seek the limelight, you just do what’s in front of you.”

In their own ways, the Harper brothers have adopted that approach to life. Cole, who manages a vineyard, says he’s watched his brother become a responsible, caring leader who consistently helps other people. “You see people leaning on him because he’s compassionate,” Cole says.

That’s because of the servant leadership he learned at St. Edward’s, says Matisen, who manages a branch of a moving company. “If I’m a crew member, then I ask, ‘What can I do to make the crew better?’ From the management side of things, I ask, ‘What can I provide you guys to let you all do things better?’ The mentality I took from my Holy Cross experience is to be present and mindful and meet people where they are.”

For the Holy Cross Brothers, service permeates everything.
Showing Up

Jalan Carter '21 takes a break from his Computer Science studies to spend every Monday afternoon surrounded by fourth-grade kids. He travels to an income-restricted apartment complex, where he helps children in an after-school program with their homework and with weekly cooking lessons.

Growing up, Carter says, money was tight, and he moved 15 times before coming to college. “I just want to make their lives as easy as possible, because I know what they’re going through,” he says.

Carter is part of the Social Justice Living Learning Community, where students with shared interests live, study and hang out together. (“It helps students ‘find their people,’” says Kris Sloan, the professor who directs the LLC).

Carter chose the Social Justice LLC because he thinks his generation has the opportunity to make changes in the world. “Without change, there is no progress, and without progress, we will be unhappy with the world we live in,” he says. “If you want to make a change in the world, you have to be present and show up.”
Extraordinary Moments That Matter

A semester at St. Edward's is made of roughly 200,000 minutes. In every one, students and professors are pushing boundaries, expanding their minds and transforming lives. Here, we capture eight of those moments, in which the ordinary becomes extraordinary.

BY ROBYN ROSS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JESSICA ATTIE ‘04,
WHITNEY DEVIN ‘10, SARAH LIM
AND MORGAN PRINTY MLA ‘17
Acacia Erhardt ’18 is a senior, but she already has a full-time job as an analyst at Falkon Ventures, a venture capital fund. The position started as an internship Erhardt landed after Assistant Professor of Entrepreneurship David Altounian introduced her to the company’s founder. She credits Altounian, a veteran of Austin’s tech industry, with giving her a hand up.

“He let me use his network and got me an opportunity,” Erhardt says, “and all I had to do was work hard.”

Altounian’s experience and network help his students in other ways, too. He’s connected students with the resources of incubators Impact Hub Austin and Capital Factory, where he is a partner. He’s introduced them to prospective employers. And he brings an industry mindset to the classroom.

“I used to focus on teaching from the business side, like: ‘Let me tell you what it’s really like,’” Altounian says. “Now I try to blend academic theory and practical aspects, and get students to relate what they’re learning to what they’ll do in the real world. The best part of my job is seeing a student like Acacia who really gets it and takes advantage of all the opportunities.”
EATING WITH FAMILY

Kale, cauliflower, vegan sushi, beans and “pecan pie things” were on the menu when five first-year students went to dinner at the macrobiotic Austin restaurant Casa de Luz. They were joined by professors Catherine MacDermott and Steven Fletcher, as well as Tony Farmer, an associate director of Residence Life, and Jennifer Dennington ’19, an upperclassman who mentors the students.

The evening was one of several “family dinners” at Austin restaurants for students in the Wicked Problems Living Learning Community. Fletcher coordinates and MacDermott teaches in the LLC, but this evening was strictly social, a chance to relax away from campus and get to know one another. Fletcher explains, “I designed these family dinners as a way to build community between faculty, staff and students. They bridge the gap between academic and social pursuits in a more personal way.”

As the students finished eating, MacDermott asked about their upcoming plans, and Farmer encouraged them to consider becoming campus leaders. They headed back to the hilltop — filled with the momentum to create new connections away from the table.

Helping Friends

On the Friday before finals week, Marlaina Widmann ’19 made an instant friend: Chaucer, a therapy dog, at an event she helped coordinate as a Peer Health Educator. “Research has shown that it’s more effective for information about some topics to come from your peers,” says Widmann, a Behavioral Neuroscience major. Through the program, she’s learned that wellness has multiple dimensions: physical, emotional, spiritual, occupational, financial and more. That concept has shaped her search for medical school — she hopes to attend one that focuses on holistic wellness.
“Our plays don’t just serve to entertain people,” says actor Jackson Pant ’20. “When we produce them, we want people to think. There’s no better feeling than knowing that our work is purposeful — than going out after a show and hearing people in the lobby talking to each other and asking questions and truly being curious about what they saw.”
OPENING MINDS

In Anon(ymous) by Naomi Iizuka, a production at Mary Moody Northen Theatre, teenage refugee Anon has been separated from his mother as the two flee their war-torn country for the United States. “It’s so easy for us to talk about immigrants and refugees as part of a whole body of ‘others’ but lose sight of the individual,” says Michelle Polgar, managing director of MMNT. “In this show, my goal is to keep the focus on the individuals.”
FINDING PURPOSE

Olivia Cason ’18 spends two days a week putting her Environmental Science and Policy major into practice as an intern at Wild Basin Creative Research Center, a 227-acre preserve on the west side of Austin that’s managed by St. Edward’s. There, she’s doing research for an app to help visitors identify the plants they see. She also sets up game cameras and reviews footage for Austin Wildlife Watch, part of a national project that monitors how animals are affected by urban encroachment.

In spare moments, she explores the trails at Wild Basin that take her to the overlook, a breathtaking view of a valley full of ashe junipers and oaks, or to the seasonal waterfall on Bee Creek. Although the preserve is surrounded by the city, the waterfall is a quiet spot. “You can hear every drop of water and listen to the birds that live in the trees above,” she says. “So many species live right there by the water, and once you’re down there you can hear it all.”

Cason’s internship at Wild Basin is her fourth experience in her field. She’s worked for the Sustainable Food Center, a nonprofit that improves people’s access to nutritious, affordable food. She’s also led an after-school gardening program at an elementary school and worked at Green Gate Farms, just east of Austin, where she registered kids for farm camp, harvested vegetables and fed pigs and goats.

These jobs have expanded Cason’s skills and professional connections — and they’ve confirmed she’s on the right career path.

“Being in nature — whether at the farm, or with kids in the gardens, or at Wild Basin — I’m able to reflect on what’s important to me and translate that into action,” she says. “I’m able to hone in on what my purpose is going to be in this world.”

STRIVING FOR UNITY

In October, students and professors at St. Edward’s sat down to lunch with community leaders and officers from the Austin Police Department for a dialogue focused on the rise in violent crime in the United States in 2015 and 2016, as well as violence between police and civilians — particularly people of color.

“Are there ways police could build relationships with the community?” Raul Alvarez, a former city council member, asked.

“Please — I need more,” Austin Police Commander Catherine Johnson said.

“Cultural competency training,” said Political Science major Alejandro Izaguirre ’20. “In my American Dilemmas class we’ve been talking about how it’s crucial to have anthropologists and sociologists in the room. If people understand the reality of oppression that racial minorities face, people start to become more empathetic. This helps government institutions become more equitable.”

Afterward, the conversation continued for a few minutes in the hallway. “This event was extremely important,” Izaguirre said. “It creates an environment for people to get out of their comfort zone and talk about issues that people face on a daily basis.”
“A master’s degree and these other super high goals weren’t on my radar because they weren’t things my family did,” says Jacqueline Flores ’18. “But when someone like Caroline Morris says, ‘Yes, you can do this,’ it makes me believe that I can definitely reach all these big goals.”

Dreaming Big

When Jacqueline Flores ’18 applied for a Summer Academic Excellence Award to pursue her dream internship at Jacob’s Pillow, a dance festival, she met Caroline Morris, who administers the award for St. Edward’s. Morris encouraged Flores to dream even bigger. Flores’ next step was winning an internship at the Public Theater in New York City — where the musical Hamilton got its start — focused on producing Shakespeare in underrepresented communities. As the first person in her family to graduate from high school, Flores says Morris’ encouragement has given her confidence to expand her ambitions beyond what she imagined was possible.
THE PURSUIT OF MEANING

AT ST. EDWARD’S, A DEGREE LEADS TO MORE THAN A FINANCIAL RETURN ON INVESTMENT. IT’S THE CULMINATION OF AN EDUCATION THAT FOSTERS A LIFE OF MEANING. AND AS FIVE ALUMNI SHARE, THAT MEANS HAVING AN IMPACT AT ALL LEVELS — FROM INDIVIDUAL TO GLOBAL.

BY MARLA HOLT, NICOLE PAJER, ERIN PETERSON AND VANESSA RICHARDSON
ILLUSTRATIONS BY JENNY MÖRTSELL
IT WAS A FAVOR for a friend that got Leigh Christie ’97 to explore her entrepreneurial side. Christie had been a practicing lawyer but left the field after having her second child. She used her free time to help develop and lead a youth program within the Entrepreneurs Foundation of Central Texas (EF), based in Austin. The result: Lemonade Day Austin, which led to nearly $2 million in lemonade and donating $875,000 to charity.

After four years with Lemonade Day Austin, Christie became director of EF’s member company programs and in 2016 was promoted to executive director. In that role, she focused on getting local technology companies better connected and more involved in the Austin community. “I helped these companies use their skills and their workforce to do just that,” she says. “Companies provided needed skills to nonprofits and community partners, and by doing so, [the companies] learned more about the places where they work and live.”

For example, Christie partnered with ECHO (Ending Community Homelessness Coalition) Austin to educate EF companies on homelessness. Within two weeks, 24 companies and 550 employees worked with eight nonprofits on 13 events to support the fight to end homelessness in Austin. “These companies gave back in a meaningful and impactful way through time, hard work, and donating their skills and core competencies,” says Christie.

In its 18 years, EF has helped its companies raise more than $11 million for other nonprofits. Christie recently started a new role as senior vice president of global technology and innovation for the Austin Chamber of Commerce, where she hopes to use the lessons from EF to make a difference.

“I got into that mindset from the beginning at St. Edward’s because of the focus on small classes,” she says. “Participation was expected, and we were pushed outside our comfort zones to complete the work. That was a great motivator, and it prepared me to be a more active participant in this role, and in my career overall.”
INDIVIDUAL

CREATING TRANSFORMATIONAL MOMENTS, ONE LIFE AT A TIME

MELISSA GREENWELL MAC ’13

MELISSA GREENWELL MAC ’13 found counseling later in life, after working in marketing and development and then taking time off to raise her kids. It was during that time that she developed an interest in therapy. “After volunteering with kids and families in schools, I decided that being licensed to help people with problems was where I needed to be,” she says. The licensed professional counselor, who has her own private practice in Austin, specializes in a variety of issues, including loss, depression and anxiety.

Greenwell strives to discover the potential in every person who enters her office. “That brings meaning to my days, when I’m able to help someone tap into something that they didn’t even know they had,” she says. “A lot of times, people come in not trusting their own voice, intuition or knowledge about who they are or what they want. To me, it’s all about helping them get clear on those things. Who are you, what do you want to be doing right now in this life, and where do you want that to get you?”

Her mission is to help her clients authentically represent themselves to the world. “I have no judgment about who you want to be. I’m just here to help you figure it out,” she says.

Greenwell credits her liberal arts background for helping her understand the human experience. “Counseling is about unlocking a dimension of the human experience for an individual who’s gotten blocked in some way,” she explains. “They need a little bit of support to get there. I love launching them from my therapist’s nest and letting them fly.”

NATIONAL

PURSUING THE RIGHT POLICIES AND CHANGING LIVES

ASHLEY NELLIS ’97

ASHLEY NELLIS ’97 first understood that compassion could — and should — be a part of our criminal justice system in Professor David Horton’s classroom at St. Edward’s.

“He engaged us in critical thinking about taking a more compassionate approach to tackling crime than rampant incarceration,” Nellis says, noting that in the state of Texas at the time, treating prisoners with compassion was considered a radical idea. She also says that the religious foundation for many of her philosophy and ethics courses demanded a more humane way of thinking about the world in which we live.

Horton has since retired, but his teaching has stayed with Nellis, a senior research analyst for The Sentencing Project in Washington, D.C., a nonprofit research-based advocacy group that works to change criminal justice policy at both the state and federal levels.

Nellis’ research is focused on the growth and prevalence of life sentences. Her work has resulted in independent studies, journal articles, and expert testimony in court cases and at state legislatures. She also researches the juvenile justice system and its overuse for youth of color in particular. She has written a book, A Return to Justice, about the system’s potential for reform.

“Our criminal justice system has gotten off track, and we are far too punitive,” Nellis says. “We have more than 160,000 people serving life in prison, so I’m working to loosen the public’s grip on lengthy terms in prison as the only solution to criminal conviction. In some states, prisoners wait 20 to 30 years before they get a first view by a parole board. We need a more reasonable and just approach.”
Steps to More Meaningful Work

Associate Vice President for the Center of Applied Learning and Social Impact Caroline Morris team-teaches a course called Meaningful Lives to first-year students. But she knows that pursuing meaning and purpose doesn't just happen at age 18. She shares her best advice about finding your own life of purpose, no matter what you do from 9 to 5.

1. **Recognize that meaningful work is possible.**
   “A lot of people think they should feel lucky just to get a job and pay their rent. But part of our job at St. Edward’s is to make people more competent than that. You’ll meet those minimums; what are you going to do once you get there?”

2. **Dig deep.**
   “Many people think meaningful work will just fall out of the sky. But it’s a much more active and messy process. It might start with asking yourself: What is the work I would do anyway, regardless of the money or societal approval?”

3. **Realize that the leap might not be as far as you think.**
   “People often perceive the distance between where they are and where they want to be as much farther than it actually is. Maybe you need to do seven things to get into the grad school or job you want. You’ve got time. Do the seven things.”

4. **Understand your personal definition of meaning.**
   “Meaningful work is work in which you are not counting the hours on the clock. Do you feel awake and challenged? Do you feel like you’re making a difference? Your work should have some congruence with your identity and who you want to be in the world.”

5. **Take action.**
   “There is often an idea that someone must ‘rescue’ you to help you get where you need to be. But I like to use a phrase I’ve borrowed from whitewater rafting and rock climbing, which is: How can you be an active participant in your own rescue? You need to own the idea that you can help yourself get unstuck, and start doing the work to find a meaningful career path.”

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**INTERNATIONAL**

**SHARING GOOD IDEAS BEYOND BORDERS**

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**JON STEUERNAGLE ’03**

AS AN INTENSIVE care doctor in Baltimore, Jon Steuernagle ’03 helps people every day. But he’s also using his healthcare and technology expertise to help medical providers around the globe offer better care to their patients.

Steuernagle is co-founder of MDRing and RNRing, two online platforms that let physicians and nurses worldwide exchange medical knowledge to better tackle global health challenges. The main goal is to help medical providers in underserved countries.

“We have a wealth of resources and research in the West, so we want to get experts in their field to share that knowledge in snippets through a global mobile platform,” he says.

Steuernagle spent a year working for Apple in Austin before going to medical school. That’s where he saw how many technology gaps were still present in modern healthcare. “The core message I learned at St. Edward’s and Apple was that it’s not good enough just to be good; you have to strive to make the world better,” he says. “What that means to me is to bridge the gap between the technology field and healthcare workers who are often too busy to keep up with it.”

Steuernagle and his group of 20 employees started MDRing and RNRing three years ago.

MDRing is also working with pharmaceutical companies on improving medical drug education and getting products to the market faster. That’s where Steuernagle says his St. Edward’s education is particularly valuable. “My professors pushed me to use a rigorous, critical-thinking approach to solving problems. When we analyze drug companies’ data and it’s not good, we decline [the drug], because we’re not just a conduit for marketing. That ability to research and critique data was finely tuned at St. Edward’s.”

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TOP OF THE GAME

Master of Opportunities
Creative thinking leads to new opportunities for Paul Gerling MBA ’98.
BY STACIA HERNSTROM MLA ’05

Paul Gerling MBA ’98 can trace his nearly two-decade career in technology banking back to, well, Napoleon. A renowned military strategist, Napoleon knew how to conquer armies much larger and more powerful than his own. How?

“He was a master of the flank,” says Gerling. Thanks to a marketing class Gerling took as an MBA student, he has also mastered flanking — the finance version. "When Gerling read the book Marketing Warfare in an MBA class, he began applying Napoleon's flanking techniques to Bank One, where he worked as a commercial banker at the time. Because the company had much bigger and more profitable competitors, Gerling looked to strengthen the bank’s position by identifying underserved markets where it could dominate. He marched into technology and helped establish a successful Corporate and Technology division.

“The only companies who were financing loans to Austin technology startups at that time were flying people in from California. I knew we could do it locally," says Gerling. "St. Edward's helped me realize that being creative could lead you to different perspectives and new opportunities.” He continues to use this perspective and creativity in leading his teams as a senior vice president at Comerica in Central Texas.

Gerling credits that mindset to his MBA faculty members, who "could teach you the business theory but also how it works in the real world because they were practitioners as well as professors.” As an adjunct instructor, he infuses his own classes with the same mix of theory and practice. "Students can learn the subject matter from the book," he says. "They want to apply that knowledge to their own careers, and my goal has always been to help them figure out how.”

In addition to teaching, Gerling is on The Bill Munday School of Business advisory board and has judged the school's annual business plan competition. "Helping guide someone's career direction is rewarding and fun," he says. “I love being able to talk to students and see the light bulb turn on. When you teach them to do something and they do it on their own, their confidence skyrockets.”

MBA grad, adjunct instructor and advisory board member Paul Gerling received the 2018 Distinguished Alumni Award.
When she graduated with a bachelor’s degree in Communication, Chelsea Elliott ’12 had one goal — start a nonprofit to screen kids for the preventable vision and hearing ailments that had taken the sight in her left eye and the hearing in her right ear.

The newly minted grad did just that, calling her nonprofit the half Helen Foundation after her childhood nickname. (Since she is half-blind and half-deaf, she began calling herself “half Helen” Keller at age 10.) Today, Elliott has acquired five cutting-edge Spot vision screeners that can take 23 eye measurements in a matter of seconds. She has screened more than 35,000 children in two states and developed a treatment-tracking app thanks to a $100,000 grant from the St. David’s Foundation. In 2015, she was recognized as a CNN Hero, a program that honors individuals who make extraordinary contributions in the lives of others. She has recruited a board of directors, which includes Dean Nancy Schreiber of The Bill Munday School of Business, and hired two full-time staff members. And during the last session of the Texas Legislature, she collaborated with Rep. Dennis Bonnen ’94 for passage of House Bill 3157, which approved the Spot screeners for use in Texas public schools beginning last fall.

The foundation’s success hasn’t come without challenges. “For everything I knew, there were a thousand things I didn’t,” she says. “Even though I could craft a message and tell a compelling story, I had no idea about things like finance and operations.” But thanks to the critical thinking she honed on the hilltop, she knew how to ask questions. “I surrounded myself with people who believed in my cause as much as I did and brought skills and ideas that complemented my own.”

She also relied on something now-retired Professor of Philosophy Bill Zanardi used to say. “He would tell us, ‘Care is the mother of all things.’ I saw that at St. Edward’s every day in the care professors gave to students, and it’s my guide for every child I meet.”

Chelsea Elliott ’12
The executive director of the half Helen Foundation and Austin alumni chapter volunteer received the 2018 Alumni Achievement Award in February.
WHY DOES AFFINITY MATTER?
Your greatest passion can determine your path, like it did for Nancy Flores ’03, this year’s recipient of the Alumni Service Award. “Nancy has advocated for Austin’s growing Latino community ever since she enrolled at St. Edward’s,” says Esther Q. Yacono, the retired director of the university’s College Assistance Migrant Program. “Now she’s a bilingual journalist whose perspective on Latino culture is highly sought-after in the city and beyond.” In March, Flores will speak during SXSW about Tejano music’s fight for visibility, and in May, she’ll help coordinate a graduation celebration for CAMP students in the Class of 2018.

“TI am president of the CAMP Alumni Association, the hilltop’s first official affinity alumni group. We serve Hilltoppers who have shared experiences and backgrounds by giving career advice, mentorship and more,” says Nancy Flores ’03. “At St. Ed’s, lots of ‘little families’ make up the whole community, like branches on a family tree.”

130+
CAMP ALUMNI
Participate in their own affinity group. Find your own “little family” at stedwards.edu/alumni (in the “Get Involved” section).

@LATINOCULTURE
Follow Flores’ personal Twitter feed and you’ll see her unwavering commitment to spotlighting the cultural impacts of indigenous and Latin people. (Plus, her art and music recommendations are amazing!)

VISIT CAMPUS
LET’S CATCH UP
Email alumni@stedwards.edu any time you plan to visit campus, and you’ll receive a small gift.

APRIL 5
DISCUSS
Is the criminal justice system really broken? Hear an attorney’s perspective.

MAY 10
HILLTOP SENDOFF
Celebrate with the Class of 2018 just before they graduate.

JUNE 14
RAISE A GLASS
Join alumni in your local area for national happy hour.
HOW TO MEET ALUMNI WHERE YOU LIVE (OR ON THE HILLTOP)

Happy Hours
Hilltoppers across the country can raise a glass and network with the St. Edward’s family in their neighborhood during National Happy Hour on June 14.

One Word: Sports
Annual NBA and MLB events are organized for alumni in Texas regions. And we love it when alumni come out to cheer on the Hilltoppers when they’re home or away!

Hillfest
At first, we weren’t sure if alumni would want to come back for Hillfest, but then you did. A lot of you. It was great, and we’ll do it again in Fall 2018.

Homecoming & Family Weekend
Our largest celebration of alumni includes tailgating, Sunday Mass and brunch, affinity gatherings, class reunions, and much more. Check flickr.com/seualumni for photos from 2018.

WHAT’S HAPPENING
Visit stedwards.edu/events and choose “Alumni” under Target Audience to see all events open to Hilltopper alumni.

You Tell Us
What’s your favorite thing to do with your favorite St. Edward’s people? Email advncomm@stedwards.edu with the subject line “Friends,” and we’ll enter you in a raffle for two alumni pint glasses.
moments

Colin de Guzman ’18
Behavioral Neuroscience
Open-Minded Adventurer

OF OPPORTUNITY

“I like to put myself in scenarios where I don’t know what’s going on. Choosing St. Edward’s was a good start of trying something new. Being involved in Campus Ministry and with Student Life, with the University Programming Board and Orientation, allowed me to see different perspectives. I learned how to create experiences through event planning with Student Life, how to reflect by going on service breaks with Campus Ministry and how to think scientifically through research in my major.”
OF IDENTITY

“I’ve learned how to be comfortable in my own skin. Coming to St. Edward’s from Cleveland, there wasn’t a lot of diversity at my high school. When I came here, I joined the Black Student Alliance and met more people who looked like me who've had similar struggles, and whom I could talk with about the black experience. I have a responsibility to my culture and to represent what being black is for me. St. Edward’s encourages me to explore that piece of myself and present it in a way I choose.”
Finding Yourself In Service

Service is an intrinsic part of the St. Edward’s culture going back to our founding by the Congregation of Holy Cross. While our students each experience service differently, they often find themselves changed as a result.

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“Everything I do, the way that I interact, I make sure that I interact kindly with people, because I’m also ultimately a disciple of God. I’m called to serve, and as a servant of God, that’s what I need to do.”

JOSUE DAMIAN-MARTINEZ ‘18