feature story

Divine intervention leads to career success for UAH alumn Chelonnda Seroyer ('02 BA English)

05

10 special visitor

Former U.S. Surgeon General Regina M. Benjamin delivers annual Martin L. King, Jr., address
MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Looking for opportunities to get involved? The Huntsville/Madison County area is full of opportunities for multicultural engagement and awareness. Our featured community partners listed below is a great place to start.

- **INTERNATIONAL SERVICES COUNCIL OF ALABAMA**
  ISC sponsors global education programs, special projects, and international delegations to the city of Huntsville. ISC also provides unique and varied opportunities for those who are interested in learning more about not only the countries and cultures represented in our community, but volunteer opportunities as hosts to international visitors or members of the ISC Diplomatic Corps.
  iscalabama.org

- **INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY OF HUNTSVILLE**
  The International Society exists to broaden awareness of diverse cultures from around the world while promoting a better understanding of the social, traditional, and historical aspects that affect the world we live in. The premier sponsor of the International Festival each fall, the society also hosts a number of other cultural events throughout the year.
  internationalsocietyofhuntsville.org

- **INTERFAITH MISSION SERVICE (IMS)**
  The purpose of the Interfaith Mission Service is to strengthen and enhance their congregations' capabilities to meet human needs, participate in the public forum, and promote religious, racial and cultural harmony. The Interfaith Mission Service has a rich history of promoting interfaith dialogue and serves the community in several ministry areas, including race and culture. In particular, the Racial Harmony Coalition is devoted to improving the racial and multicultural relations in the Huntsville/Madison County area.
  interfaithmissionservice.org

- **OFFICE OF MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS-MAYOR’S OFFICE**
  The City of Huntsville's Office of Multicultural Affairs’ mission is to foster an environment that reflects the equal treatment and participation of all segments of Huntsville’s diverse, culturally rich communities; in the areas of civic, economic, educational and social development. A key component of this effort involves the development of neighborhood and civic associations throughout the City of Huntsville.
  huntsvilleal.gov/multiculturalaffairs

- **ASHA KIRAN**
  Asha Kiran’s mission is to educate, empathize and empower persons of South Asian origin and beyond while providing culturally sensitive and confidential services to people experiencing traumatic/stressful situations. Their services include a crisis hotline, emergency shelter, community outreach and support. Their website includes an archive of community events, volunteer initiatives, and you may also sign up to receive their monthly e-newsletter.
  ashakiranonline.org

- **ALABAMA HISPANIC ASSOCIATION**
  The Alabama Hispanic Association prides itself on bridging the gap between the Hispanic community and the community at large by providing education and cultural awareness programs and fostering community outreach.
  alabamahispanicassociation.org
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Welcome to the second issue of Diverse Connections, the magazine of the UAH Office of Diversity. We are pleased to share the many diverse ventures and venues of the office and the publics that it serves. In this issue is a significant cross-section of race, culture, ethnicity, and inclusion among our faculty, staff, students and the Huntsville community we serve.

We realize that American and collegial student demographics are shifting, according to studies that are detailed in a recently published book by Paul Taylor, Executive Vice President at the Pew Research Center: The Next America: Boomers, Millennials, and The Looming Generational Showdown.

Taylor states that America is in the throes of a demographic overhaul. He addresses huge generational gaps in social and political values, economic well-being, family structure, racial and ethnic identity, gender norms, religious affiliation, and the use of technology. He goes on to state that projections indicate that by 2050 America will be a non-majority country. Additionally, a recent Chronicle of Higher Education article detailed that a major demographic shift is coming – are colleges ready?

A compendium of articles in The Chronicle addresses that more than half of private and public institutions are already experiencing shifts in admission and raises the timely question of whether colleges are ready and preparing to address and accommodate this demographic shift.

The Educational Testing Service and the College Board now address not only ACT/SAT scores and high school GPA, but non-cognitive factors as part of the admissions process.

America is changing. Are we keeping pace?

DELOIS H. SMITH
Vice President for the Office of Diversity

Delois H. Smith is Vice President for Diversity at UAH. She joined the university in 1984 and has held progressively responsible positions in the areas of Student Affairs and upper administration.

Smith was appointed as Director of Student Development Services in 1992, and has also served the university as Special Assistant to the Vice President for Student Affairs, and as the Vice President for Student Affairs. In 2009, Smith was appointed by the UAH President to head and develop the Office of Diversity and Student Support Services for the campus. As Vice President for Diversity and Student Support Services, she was responsible for strategic planning, fiscal management and staffing for diversity serving faculty, staff, and students, Student Health Services, the Counseling Center, services for students with disabilities, and the Office of Multicultural Affairs.

She is involved in service to the Huntsville and Madison County and works and serves on many university and community leadership boards, committees, and agencies.

Smith is a Licensed Professional Counselor, a Nationally Certified Counselor, a Board Certified Clinical Psychotherapist, and a Qualified Intercultural Administrator.

She graduated from The University of Florida with an undergraduate degree in Psychology and a master’s degree in Educational Psychology.

KIMBERLY CRUTCHER-WILLIAMS
Assistant Director — Office of Multicultural Affairs

Kimberly Crutcher-Williams began working in the OMA in 2003, and serves as Assistant Director. In administrative collaboration with the Office of Diversity and through academic programming, she is working to foster an understanding and respect for cultural diversity as she serves on- and off-campus constituents.

OMA provides academic and personal counseling for students as well as mentoring. Williams is responsible for the overall operations of the OMA office as well as external and internal sponsored and co-sponsored forums, seminars, workshops, and student activities.

Crutcher-Williams graduated from UAH in 2003 with a master of arts degree from the College of Liberal Arts. She serves as a diversity representative for numerous university and external councils and committees, and is an advisor for various student clubs and organizations.

BRANDIE ROBERTS
Administrative Assistant

Brandie Roberts serves as the Administrative Assistant to the Vice President of Diversity at UAH. She is responsible for managing the daily workflow for diversity. Those duties specifically include making appointments, arranging travel, and coordinating workshops, presentations, and meetings with university and community boards and agencies, while maintaining tact, diplomacy, and confidentiality. Roberts also prioritizes a variety of time-sensitive projects on a daily basis, and acts as the liaison in communicating policies and procedures to faculty, staff, students, and administrators in matters concerning state and federal compliance laws related to diversity and inclusion.

She leads all freshman orientation diversity presentations, prepares administrative reports for the Office of Diversity, and tracks active files related to equity, affirmative-action, Title IX, EEO, and discrimination complaints. Roberts also prepares numerous federal and collegiate reports, as well as maintaining budget and financial reports.

KATHRYNN SEIDLER ENGBERG
Grant Writer

Kathrynn Seidler Engberg completed her Ph.D. at The University of Alabama. While at Alabama A&M University, she wrote and helped implement large multidisciplinary grants and published her book, *The Right to Write: The Literary Politics of Anne Bradstreet and Phillis Wheatley*. She previously taught courses in the UAH Department of English and was a grant coordinator for the last year of the CGM-PLUS BellSouth grant at UAH. This grant focused on activities that helped retain first-generation and minority students. The success of that grant became the catalyst for creating a Student Success Center. Kathrynn now works for both the Office of Diversity and the Office for Proposal Development, and helps to coordinate, write, and review multi-disciplinary, multi-dollar, multi-agency proposals.
For Rachel King (’14 BA Philosophy, Political Science) learning was never limited to what was taught in the classroom. Her parents made sure of that. “The example they set for me was to always seek knowledge.”

King attributes her proclivity toward philosophy to her parents, who instilled in King at an early age a sense of intellectual independence. “My brother and I were the kids writing book reports and doing math problems during summer vacation,” she said. “While at the time, I wasn’t the biggest fan of this ‘extra’ work, it instilled in me a sense of self-discipline that I believe is very beneficial in reading, thinking, and writing about complex philosophical issues.”

King was born in Huntsville. Her dad, a sergeant in the Army, was reassigned to Fort Stewart, Ga., for several years, but the family eventually made their way back to Huntsville when she was eight years old. She attended New Century Technology High School.

She always knew about UAH, and would often hear about major events held on campus. “My first actual visit to UAH was when I participated in the Poetry Out Loud Competition. I won my school-wide poetry contest and was selected to participate in the regionals held at UAH. I remember thinking that it was pretty cool that a school known for engineering and technology would host an event like Poetry Out Loud.

“As I think back, I believe it was this foundation of understanding what UAH could and would offer outside of the technological and engineering fields that made me comfortable making the decision to pursue a philosophy and political science degree at UAH,” she explained.

King said she will always cherish the feeling of community and camaraderie she experienced while attending class at UAH.

“I enjoyed feeling comfortable to go to my professors during office hours to continue a discussion we had in class, or just to seek their advice on something. In particular, several of us in my political science classes would routinely meet up and have an impromptu study group for an upcoming test. My top three classes that I thoroughly enjoyed at UAH would have to be Phenomenology and Genealogy with Dr. William Wilkerson, Introduction to Logic with Dr. Andrew Cling, and a course in World History since 1500 with Dr. John Kvach.

“There are many styles of philosophy, and our department teaches all of them. While many students do better at some kinds of philosophy compared to others, Rachel seems able to do any and all forms of philosophy, from advanced symbolic logic to more ‘literary’ style philosophy,” said Dr. William Wilkerson, Dean of Honors College at UAH, who also served as King’s senior advisor. “She has a terrific ability to always ‘know where the problems are’ with any idea or theory under consideration.

Rachel did not come to UAH to study philosophy. Instead, she discovered philosophy in an introductory course and fell in love with it immediately,” Wilkerson said. “I believe that Rachel will go very far. She has a terrific talent, and is also a warm, engaging, and highly motivated person. I can see her completing her degree and getting a job at a high-level philosophy department with a graduate program.”

King was recently awarded the prestigious Penn State Bunton-Waller Fellowship. It is an enhanced graduate assistantship award given to incoming graduate degree students. Only 18-25 students are selected annually to apply for four openings in the program.

“When I first received the offer letter by email, I was in shock. I think I stayed in a state of shock and disbelief until I actually received a hard copy in the mail. I am ecstatic that, just as I complete my undergraduate studies, I have the opportunity to leap forward into a well established Ph.D. philosophy program. I accepted the offer the first week of April following my visit to the campus during recruitment week. I will start the program this fall.”

“Applications to Ph.D. programs in philosophy typically will run at a rate of 150 to 200 applications for about five to 10 slots,” according to Wilkerson. “So just getting accepted is quite special. An offer this generous is even more rare.”
Divine intervention. That’s how Chelonnda Seroyer (’02 BA English), an alumna of UAH, describes her chance meeting more than 10 years ago with education rock stars Drs. Harry and Rosemary Wong. The husband and wife duo are renowned educational consultants and the authors of the groundbreaking how-to book for teachers, *The First Days of School: How to Be an Effective Teacher*. The book has sold over four million copies, been published in six languages, and implemented in thousands of collegiate education curriculums.

After graduating from UAH in 2002, Seroyer was offered a teaching position at Bob Jones High School in Madison, Ala. It was during her first year as a high school teacher that Seroyer began implementing classroom management procedures from *The First Days of School*. She had the opportunity to attend one of Harry Wong’s workshops in Grand Prairie, TX. After the workshop, Seroyer and hundreds of other teachers had the same idea: meet with Wong, get personal copies of the book autographed and perhaps chat with the education icon — if only for a moment or two.
“The longer I stood in that line and saw all of those teachers waiting, I knew my chances of meeting with Dr. Wong were dwindling fast,” she said. Determined to meet with Wong personally, and realizing she was running out of options, Seroyer did the only thing she could do. She went out the side door of the building and approached Wong as he entered his car to leave.

Long story, short: Wong invited Seroyer to share the national and international stage with him and Rosemary, giving presentations to thousands of teachers on classroom management and student motivation.

“The journey from that point until now is absolutely littered with success stories and life changing experiences,” said Seroyer. “There are certain things in my life that I know for sure...one of those things is that Drs. Harry and Rosemary Wong were always meant to be in my life. It is not humanly possible for me to put into words how much they mean to me and my family. I can say, with absolute certainty, that I have learned more from them than I have from anyone else in my adult life. They have given me my wings and taught me how to navigate so many aspects of life that it would be impossible to list them all...and the list is still growing.”

In addition to conducting teacher workshops with the Wongs, Seroyer conducts solo presentations both nationally and internationally for numerous school districts. “Last year I was in 38 different cities during the summer months.” She is also featured in the fourth edition of The First Days of School DVD, and has contributed to the Wongs’ new publication, The Classroom Management Book.

Professionally and personally Seroyer is in a good place. She credits UAH for helping to achieve career goals, and fondly remembers her time as a student.

“Quite simply, I would not have been able to establish my career without the liberal arts degree that I received from UAH. Morton Hall was my home. Many of the classrooms in that building are filled with memories of learning, laughing, and growing. The debates during philosophy courses, the pondering and self-reflection that I experienced in my literature courses, and the presentations and feedback in my journalism courses are just some of the things that have contributed to who I am today. Each of these experiences helped to provide me with the foundation that I needed to succeed after graduation,” Seroyer said.

She cherishes memories of the people who were extremely important to her during her UAH years. “I remember Delois Smith (Vice President for Diversity) and Dr. Lee Williams (Professor Emeritus of History and past Director of the Office of Multicultural Affairs) were constant sources of support and were always available when I needed advice and words of encouragement.”

Her “undeniably fondest memories” of her years at UAH are associated with becoming a member of the Omicron Gamma Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc., and establishing “lifelong and airtight friendships” that have withstood the test of time.

“As the chapter president, I was given the opportunity to learn and grow on so many levels. Our chapter advisor, sorority sister Sheila Baxter, likely has no idea how much she influenced my life. I watched her balance her professional, home, and social duties while seamlessly maintaining the poise and elegance of a strong and sophisticat-
ed woman of grace,” Seroyer reflected. “Because my mother passed away when I was 17 years old, I was constantly observing other women as examples of how a woman should behave. Now that I have a husband, children, and a career, I look back and appreciate, even more, the unintentional lessons that Sheila taught me during my time at UAH.”

As Seroyer travels the country helping educators to improve their school culture, she believes steadfastly that the K-12 public education curriculum is due for a universal makeover.

“We must adopt an unwavering commitment to stay laser focused on the only people that matter in this equation — the students,” Seroyer stressed. “So often I see educational fads, programs, and initiatives that seem to stray away from what’s best for students. However, if we put our resources into hiring and training the best teachers we must provide them with quality, relevant, purposeful, and ongoing support. I am so passionate about educational reform because I know it’s possible. We just have to get to the root of what it will take to make it happen. I’m excited just thinking about it!”

As enthusiastic as she is about the future of education reform, it is Seroyer’s family, husband Steve (high school teacher and football coach) and their teenage twins Lauren and Grant, that keeps her grounded and brings her joy.

“The twins keep me super busy with school and sports activities, and everything else that teenagers do,” she said. “I have been keeping this [consulting] schedule for more than nine years, so we are all used to it. People often ask me, ‘How do you do all of this [travel] with a set of twins at home?’ And my answer is simple… I have the most amazing husband on earth. He takes care of the twins while I am on the road. We stay in close contact during my trips and we work together to ensure that everything stays on track. I could never do what I do without his support. Our marriage is yet another divine intervention… meant to be from the very beginning.”

“Never in my wildest dreams did I envision this career path,” Seroyer reflected. “My only objective was to help as many students as I could. I wanted to use literature to teach them life lessons. I never imagined that the path would take me into classrooms around the world.”
Carey Link (‘08 BA Psychology) is a fighter. A UAH alumna and self-proclaimed “Army brat” she likes to set the record straight right away. In other words, don’t let her size or physical disability fool you about her fighting spirit and fierce determination to carry through any challenges put before her.

“I was raised as part of an Army family. We had to move often. I’ve had the opportunity to live in places across the United States and in Germany. I consider my hometown to be Huntsville. I attended four high schools in four years, but I graduated from Lee High School,” she said. Link is the daughter of James M. and Judy Link (Lieutenant General U.S. Army, Retired). LTG Link is the former president of Teledyne Brown Engineering.

Although she uses a wheelchair, Link’s independence blossomed while she was a student at UAH. A preemie at birth, she was also born with cerebral palsy. The disorder causes impaired muscular power and coordination due to brain damage that occurs before or during the childbirth process. During Link’s time at the university she blazed a trail for herself and other students with physical disabilities by subtly leading the charge for equal access to buildings, services, and activities available to her able-bodied peers.

“My parents taught me to be my own advocate. I think my presence at UAH helped create awareness about problems with accessibility at the university...there have been positive changes focused around access at UAH. People had to work together to make these changes happen, and I thank all who did. I only took part in this process,” Link said. “American culture is more inclusive of individuals with disabilities than it was when I was growing up in the 1980s. Ultimately, I think we will always have progress to make in the process of inclusion. Everyone is an important part of the tapestry of diversity—we all have something to contribute. People with disabilities have talents, abilities, want to work, and like anyone else should be given the opportunity to seek and compete for employment,” she added.

Link remembers the UAH Office of Student Affairs and Counseling, then directed by Delois Smith, as being instrumental in offering assistance with academic requirements and providing other resources and services to ensure student success.

“When I was a student at UAH, Delois Smith’s Office of Student Affairs and Counseling educated me about my rights as a student, how to apply for reasonable academic accommodations (for example, getting a note taker or extended time on exams), and ensured those accommodations were carried out.”

“Carey was essentially the eyes and ears for physically challenged students on the campus,” said Smith, now Vice President for Diversity. “As a student consumer, she was very instrumental in providing valuable feedback to our office on how we could continually improve on accessibility and academic accommodations.”

Link has fond memories of other UAH mentors including psychology professor, Dr. Aurora Torres. “She taught some of my most challenging courses at UAH. I believe a teacher who truly challenges is not only ef-
effective but wants their students to be excited about learning. Dr. Torres has supported and advised me toward my longtime goal to become a counselor.”

Link first became interested in psychology and counseling after taking a class in her junior year of high school. She is an Equal Employment Opportunity Specialist on Redstone Arsenal. She advises civilian clients on the Army’s EEO process for filing an alleged complaint based on discrimination in the workplace, and she conducts mediation.

“My UAH educational experience has contributed to my career success by instilling in me the importance of affective communication. For example, implementing reflective listening while talking with clients helps me to understand what they are experiencing.”

An average day on the job for Link includes keeping up to speed with alleged workplace discrimination complaints and advising clients on the EEO process. “The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission is the final decision-maker on a finding of discrimination. I help decide if a case should initially be accepted or dismissed for investigation based on a set of standards, not merit. I write reports and ensure that complaint files are updated.”

Lately, Link has achieved notoriety as a published poet. Her poetry chapbook entitled *What it Means to Climb a Tree* was published three years ago. The collection of poetry centers on trees and the freedom they represent to Link. Her fascination with trees as a theme began in a poetry writing class several years ago, when Kelly Cherry, renowned poet and visiting Eminent Scholar in the Humanities, taught at UAH. “I took a class in poetry sequence writing from Professor Cherry at UAH in 2004. My book, *What it Means to Climb a Tree*, began as an assignment for Professor Cherry’s class.”

Link said, while it is gratifying to have published a book, her ultimate goal was only to share herself with others. “The creative process of writing poetry has helped me to heal and find part of my identity.” In promoting her chapbook, Link has read her poetry on Sundial Writer’s Corner (WLRH Huntsville and Tennessee Valley Public Radio).

She received the Goals 2000 Service Award, and participated in a poetry reading at UAH sponsored by the Department of Women’s and Gender Studies. Additionally, she received the Scott Lawrence Rainbow Award, a Scholastic Writing Award from the Creative Writing Magnet Program, the President’s Award for Outstanding Community Service, the Alabama Exemplary Youth Service Award, and the Outstanding Achievement Award from United Cerebral Palsy of Huntsville and the Tennessee Valley.

Also, she was named as first runner-up for Ms. Wheelchair Alabama and earned a scholarship. Ms. Wheelchair Alabama travels around the state as an advocate for individuals with disabilities. Her poetry has been published in local, statewide, national, and international publications, some of which include *The Allegheny Review* and *The Birmingham Arts Journal.*

*What it Means to Climb a Tree* is available online at [www.finishinglinepress.com](http://www.finishinglinepress.com) and [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

Graphic courtesy of Patricia Eldridge
The past two summers I have had the opportunity to participate in Summer Faculty workshops at the Rand Pardee Graduate School in Santa Monica, Calif. In these workshops, college faculty learn about the formulation and implementation of policy so that they, or the organizations they represent, can “Be the Change.” I would like to recount some brief thoughts and broach some questions about policy and diversity on the UAH campus.

A review of last year’s magazine and Vice President of Diversity Delois Smith’s words reveal a commitment “to facilitate the development of institutional structure that advances equity and diversity for students, faculty, and staff at UAH.” The inaugural issue highlights campus speakers such as Derek Greenfield, alumna Rhega Craig Gordon, major gifts officer Benita Hopkins, nurse Christine Smith, and journalist Wendi Thompson. As a reader I came away with the impression that UAH is concerned and committed to diversity. However, as a UAH campus member for approximately ten years, I would say that there is still room for growth. Though diversity is embraced by administrators, faculty, staff, and students, it does not necessarily permeate the institution through policy—and only through policy can there be a lasting impact so that our campus reflects the diversity of our state.

Consider the following numbers. According to the United States Census Bureau 2013 estimates, 31 percent of Alabama citizens are members of under-represented groups, which I am defining as African-American, Hispanic American, American Indian, or Alaskan native. However, in the 2012-2013 academic year, 15 percent of those receiving undergraduate degrees at UAH were members of under-represented groups, 10 percent who received master’s degrees were members of underrepresented groups, and eight percent of those receiving doctoral degrees were members of these groups.

How can we improve these numbers? One can consider policy implementations such as a limit on the amount of debt a student amasses while pursuing his or her degree. This policy would impact not only under-represented students but first-generation attendees and those who have limited financial resources. A goal such as this would require increased financial contributions and greater involvement from philanthropic organizations.

Another policy that would positively impact diversity would be the inclusion of diversity criteria in the tenure and promotion of professors who are part of the front line when it comes to student engagement and education. Is a professor’s research group a reflection of Alabama? Does the demographic compilation of students conducting research at the forefront of science, engineering, nursing, business, education and the humanities, reflect diversity in race, sexual orientation, gender and religion? If our faculty are world class in their research and teaching, should we not expect them to be world class in establishing a diverse research environment and in hiring teaching assistants that reflect the student population? Are there implications for departments and colleges that do not have gender equity? Is it unreasonable for a female student majoring in engineering to expect to have academic and personal exposure to more than one or two woman professors in their time at UAH?

Establishing policies that answer these type of questions would not only positively impact diversity, but continue to place UAH at the forefront of conversations in higher education. I envision a UAH that is not only considered one of the best returns on investment, but a campus that competes with UAB as one of the most diverse campuses in the United States.

Improved enrollment counts, graduation rates, and the publication of this second issue on diversity indicate we are making progress in achieving diversity. However, we must make sure we continue to establish sound effective policy so that as the key players change, our institution will continue to make progress in the right direction. We should not be satisfied until we are part of every “best of…” conversation when it comes to higher education, which also includes diversity.

- Dr. Emanuel Waddell
Associate Professor of Chemistry
UAH welcomed former U.S. Surgeon General Regina M. Benjamin, MD, as the keynote speaker for the annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Commemoration Program. The annual event was sponsored by the UAH Office of Diversity and the Office of Multicultural Affairs.

“We are pleased that the UAH Offices of Diversity and Multicultural Affairs had this wonderful opportunity to have Dr. Regina Benjamin join us in celebration of an ideal Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. had for access to services that were not always available to members of our society. A healthy populace is an asset to all of society,” said Delois H. Smith, Vice President for Diversity.

Dr. Regina M. Benjamin was appointed the 18th Surgeon General of the United States by President Barack Obama in July 2009. She is the founder and former CEO of the Bayou LaBatre Rural Health Clinic located in the tiny fishing village of Bayou LaBatre, Ala.

Benjamin oversaw the operational command of 6,700 uniformed public health officers who serve in locations around the world to promote and protect the health of the American people. While in office, Benjamin focused her attention on prevention.

Benjamin is a former Associate Dean for Rural Health at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine in Mobile and past chair of the Federation of State Medical Boards of the United States. She was the first physician under age 40 and the first African American woman to be elected to the American Medical Association Board of Trustees. She served as President of the American Medical Association Education and Research Foundation, and Chair of the AMA Council on Ethical and Judicial Affairs.

In 2002, she became the first African American female president of a state medical society in the United States when she assumed leadership of the Medical Association of the State of Alabama.

In 2008, Benjamin was the recipient of the prestigious MacArthur Foundation Genius Award. The $500,000 award is given to people who demonstrate “exceptional creativity and promise.” The funds helped Benjamin rebuild her Bayou LaBatre Rural Health Clinic, which was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina (August 2005) and then again by fire (January 2006) less than six months after flood damage was repaired.
To Huda Al-Ghaib (‘11 MS EE, ‘15 PH.D. ECE) the often-fatal disease, cancer, is the only true “enemy of the world.”

For nearly three years Al-Ghaib, a doctoral student at UAH, has been conducting research in the area of pattern recognition with medical imaging applications using Computer-Aided Diagnosis (CAD) to investigate landmarks that could identify suspicious breast lesions. CAD is widely used as a breast imaging technology for detection and characterization of cancer.

“With an improved registration algorithm we will be able to detect the gradual malignant changes in the breast tissue. Early detection of carcinomas increase the survival rate with more successful treatment options,” said Al-Ghaib. “I consider cancer my only enemy in this world and if I can touch the life of one person with my mammography research that is all I need to make me feel that I have contributed to humanity.”

Born in Iraq (Baghdad), Al-Ghaib received her bachelor’s degree in Computer Engineering from the University of Technology in Baghdad (2006). While in Iraq she worked as an engineer in the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research for two years.

“Although my work was pleasant, I felt that it was not challenging enough for me. I was always curious and wanted to explore new things, and that is why the concept of graduate study came to mind. I wanted to pursue a graduate degree and never thought I would be able to do it in a foreign country. However, with family encouragement and support, I applied for a Fulbright scholarship to study in the United States. I eventually earned a Fulbright Foreign Student Grant to attend graduate school at UAH.”

Since 2009, Al-Ghaib has been working under the supervision of Dr. Reza Adhami (Professor Emeritus) in the university’s Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering (ECE) in signal processing technology. While completing her master’s degree Al-Ghaib became interested in the area of pattern recognition and data mining. She completed and defended her masters thesis in Electrical Engineering in 2011. Adhami was professor and chairperson of ECE before retiring earlier this year.

“Dr. Adhami suggested that I review the dissertation of a former student that was related to breast tumor classifications,” she explained. “I read it and became so excited and passionate about mammography. The more I read, the more interested I became in performing research in an area that one day could contribute to the enhancement of early breast cancer diagnosis.”

But performing mammography research at UAH would prove to be
a challenge. Because the university is not a medical school, Al-Ghaib and the members of the research team had to improvise in a big way.

"Our research team consisted of myself and another graduate student, Stephanie Cleveland. To complement the theoretical knowledge of the team with practical expertise, I was given the task of finding mammogram analysis experts at The University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) and here in Huntsville," explained Al-Ghaib. "With Dr. Adhami’s help I arranged meetings with one of the best breast radiologists at UAB, Dr. Heidi Umphrey. The UAH team traveled to UAB several times and met with Umphrey, the program director for the UAB Department of Radiology Breast Imaging Fellowship. Umphrey provided the UAH team with more insight into the field of mammography." In addition, Al-Ghaib contacted one of the best breast radiologists in Huntsville, Dr. Melanie Scott. "She provided ultimate support for our research team, and allowed us to shadow her and learn more about mammography. Dr. Scott was always there to answer any questions regarding mammography and what is needed for the current CAD systems."

Al-Ghaib said current CAD systems are not smart enough to clearly identify or compare possible differences between mammograms taken in previous years on the same patient. "CAD systems provide initial screening by automating mammogram analysis and marking a suspicious region that is used by radiologists for final diagnosis. Some breast lesions are easily identified by CAD such as masses and calcifications, but almost all CAD systems lack a registration process. Therefore, to compare a patient’s previous mammograms, radiologists have to perform the time-consuming task of visually comparing temporal mammograms one at a time," she explained. "Having an automated mammogram registration could help locate changes in breast abnormalities over time. This streamlined process would then become a valuable tool by speeding up the inspection of mammograms by radiologists."

“When a human being (radiologist) observes two or more very similar pictures, the probability of detecting all differences is very low. However, machines can detect minuscule differences that may not be noted by human beings. This process is called automatic image registration," Adhami explained. "A perfect mammogram registration system can detect signs that could alert radiologists regarding suspicious lesions. Further investigation by a radiologist could yield to early detection of breast cancer and hopefully decrease the mortality rate."

Adhami noted that Al-Ghaib has been commended for her research, teaching, and community service. “During her graduate work at UAH, she has authored and coauthored 10 conference papers and submitted four journal articles that are under revision. As a graduate teaching assistant (GTA) she has taught several laboratories including an introductory course, fundamentals of electrical and computer engineering laboratory, digital signal processing laboratory, and substituted as a lecturer in the graduate courses, digital signal processing, digital image processing, and graduate capstone design. When it comes to teaching, she gives her complete attention to student learning,” Adhami said. “She is highly regarded and considered as one of the best teachers among students and faculty. And, Huda was recently recognized for her outstanding performance in both teaching and research by the UAH College of Engineering. She was named the Outstanding Graduate Student of the year. This award is given to one student during the academic year.”

Additionally, Al-Ghaib has been active in serving the local community as a volunteer for Friends Inc. In this capacity, she provided support to patients with serious illnesses or disabilities, enabling them to maximize their independence. She also served as a volunteer for the American Cancer Society of Huntsville, where she served as a fund raiser to support patients with cancer.

Most of Al-Ghaib’s research activities have been funded by Adhami. She also received financial support from the UAH Office of Diversity to attend and present research findings at national conferences. “The knowledge that Huda gains from attending these conferences will be invaluable to her UAH research efforts,” said Delois H. Smith, Vice President for Diversity. “Breast cancer research and its benefits are a concern for all women, and men as well. The focus and continuing emphasis Huda’s research brings to this devastating disease lends hope to all breast cancer survivors and their families.”

“Two of the best opportunities given to me at UAH was the support that I received from the Office of Diversity and Dr. Adhami to attend a mammography seminar held last year in Arizona by world renowned mammogram analysis scientist, Dr. László Tabár,” said Al-Ghaib. Tabár is a well-known radiologist and researcher in the area of screening mammography. At the seminar, Al-Ghaib was the only engineer among 58 well-known and experienced radiologists.

Al-Ghaib graduated from UAH last spring with a Ph.D. in ECE. She accepted a professorship at Utah Valley University that will allow her to continue conducting independent mammography research.
DIVERSITY CO-SPONSORS VISIT BY CONDOLEEZZA RICE

The UAH Office of Diversity co-sponsored a visit to Huntsville by former U.S. Secretary of State Dr. Condoleezza Rice.

Rice was the keynote speaker at Girls Incorporated of Huntsville’s “Invest in a Girl” dinner co-sponsored by the UAH Office of Diversity and Davidson Technologies.

Rice is the Thomas and Barbara Stephenson Senior Fellow on Public Policy at the Hoover Institution, Professor of Political Economy in the Stanford Graduate School of Business, and Professor of Political Science at Stanford University. She is also a founding partner of Rice, Hadley, Gates, LLC.

Rice served as the 66th Secretary of State of the United States, the second woman and first African American woman to hold the post. Since 2009, she has served as Vice Chairman of the Board of Governors, for the Boys and Girls Clubs of America.

The annual “Invest in a Girl” fundraising dinner allows Girls Inc. of Huntsville to provide scholarships for girls to attend the organization’s year-round comprehensive program promoting education and workforce development programs.

C. NICOLE THOMPSON, DAYLAN WOODALL AND DELOIS SMITH PRESENT AT THE NATIONAL (NCORE) CONFERENCE

Delois H. Smith, recently gave a presentation at the 27th Annual National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in American Higher Education (NCORE).

Smith and co-presenters Daylan Woodall, a former UAH Admissions Counselor; and C. Nichole Thompson, Assistant Director of the Office of Accountability and Advocacy, Auburn University Montgomery, presented the session “Being the Only One: Understanding the Intricacies and Pressures of Often Being the Sole Minority in a Majority Culture.” The session was able to draw a standing-room only crowd at the NCORE conference, held in Indianapolis.

“Our purpose and goal with the session was to raise awareness and inform session attendees about the pressures and cultural assimilations that a minority individual deals with on a regular basis when adjusting to a majority culture,” said Delois Smith.

“That organizational awareness contributes to positive growth in general and the retention of the minority individual,” she said. “We were very pleased to see the interest and need we suspected was validated by the session attendance and positive feedback.”

Smith and Thompson presented earlier this year at the 2015 NCORE session in Washington, D.C.
Lilly Ledbetter’s crusade for equal pay didn’t start out as a public or political fight; it was strictly personal. Ledbetter didn’t stop fighting until the legislation that bears her name, “The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Restoration Act of 2009,” was signed into law by President Barack Obama — his first piece of legislation after taking office.

Ledbetter gave the keynote address at the Alabama Women Student Leaders Conference (ALA-WSL pronounced “ala-whistle”) at UAH. The conference was organized by the American Association of University Women (AAUW-Huntsville Branch), and was sponsored by the Office of Diversity and the Women’s Studies Program.

Ledbetter, of Jacksonville, Ala., worked at Goodyear Tire and Rubber for nearly 20 years before she discovered she was paid much less than her male counterparts. She sued the company and in a lower court ruling Goodyear was initially ordered to pay Ledbetter $3.3 million. That amount was later reduced to $300,000.

Ledbetter’s life story, based on the book *Grace and Grit: How I Won My Fight at Goodyear and Beyond*, has been turned into a screenplay and is being made into a movie, *The Good Years*.

Sponsors for Ledbetter’s appearance on the UAH campus included the College of Business Administration, College of Engineering, and the Women’s Economic Development Council.

**GRADUATE STUDENTS ATTEND GLOBAL INITIATIVE UNIVERSITY**

Two UAH graduate students, Joy Agee and Kenya Wallace, were selected to attend the prestigious Clinton Global Initiative University (CGI U) for college graduate and undergraduate students in Arizona.

Agee (‘10 MS Biological Science), a doctoral candidate in Biotechnology Science and Engineering, and Wallace (‘12 MS Chemistry), a doctoral student in Material Science, attended the two-day conference courtesy of the UAH Office of Diversity. Agee was one of five black student leaders recently profiled in the Clinton Global Initiative national newsletter.

President William Clinton, former U.S. Secretary Hillary Clinton, and Chelsea Clinton hosted the CGI U at Arizona State University. The CGI U is a growing community of student innovators and entrepreneurs working to turn ideas into action.

While pursuing her doctorate degree at UAH, Agee worked as a graduate research assistant at the HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology. Excelling academically as well as professionally, Agee’s involvement in numerous activities and societies include the UAH Minority Graduate Student Association, Alpha Kappa Alpha Inc., Phi Beta Kappa, the American Association for University Women, the NSF Graduate Research Fellowship Program and Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation, the Gates Millennium Scholars Program, Leadership Huntsville/Madison County, and the UAH Alumni Association.

In addition to completing her Ph.D. degree, Wallace holds memberships in several professional organizations, including the National Organization of Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers, the American Association for University Women, the UAH Minority Graduate Student Association, the Alabama Women Student Leaders Conference, and the UAH Alumni Association.

**EDUCATION ’ROCK STARS’ LEAD TEACHERS’ WORKSHOP AT UAH**

More than 400 North Alabama K-12 teachers attended a free workshop on the UAH campus led by the “rock stars” of education training, Drs. Harry and Rosemary Wong. Also presenting at the workshop was former Bob Jones High School Teacher of the Year, and UAH alumna, Chelonnda Seroyer (‘02 English).

The workshop, “Effectively Managing Your Classroom,” was sponsored by the UAH Office of Diversity, in conjunction with the Department of Education and the Division of Professional and Continuing Studies. Drs. Harry and Rosemary Wong are the most sought-after speakers in education today, and have authored more than 30 publications including the leading book in education, *The First Days of School*.

For more than two decades the Wongs have helped teachers learn how to be more effective. The Wongs are recipients of numerous national and international education awards and honors. Wong and his wife, Rosemary, built a school in the jungles of Cambodia which gives hundreds of children the opportunity to have an education.
For the UAH Hispanic Student Organization (HSO), and staff of the Office of Diversity, December is the season for recruiting. Last winter, a team of 17 people including university professors, students, staff, community volunteers, NASA engineers, and Boeing engineers left Huntsville for San Juan, Puerto Rico. "We carried more than 15 boxes of school supplies, recruitment materials, and other donations," said Maria Emma Torres, president of the university’s HSO.

Upon their arrival to the island, the UAH group traveled to the University of Puerto Rico at Humacao (UPR), to attend a special ceremony where Charles F. Bolden, Jr., NASA Administrator, honored members of the UPR Moonbuggy Team for their 2014 first place performance. The UAH Office of Diversity and HSO hosted the UPR team during their visit to Huntsville, which included a talk by UAH President Robert Altenkirch, campus tours, and meals.

This is the second year in a row the HSO has organized a December service trip to Puerto Rico, reaching out to high school students in Hispanic communities to promote UAH and discuss the importance of obtaining a college degree. It is the first visit to the island of Puerto Rico by Diversity staff members Delois H. Smith (vice president) and Brandie Roberts (administrative assistant).

The UAH group included professors Dr. William Setzer (professor and department chair, Chemistry) and Dr. Housam Toutanji (associate dean and department chair in Civil & Environmental Engineering); 10 students; NASA and Boeing employees; community volunteers; and, of course, Smith and Roberts. Torres has been the driving force behind organizing the annual recruitment trip to the island. "We planned the visit to Puerto Rico with the purpose of recruiting students to pursue a college education at UAH. On the trip we traveled to public high schools, private high schools, and universities in both urban and rural areas in an effort to recruit students for both undergraduate and graduate studies at UAH."

A senior at UAH, Torres is double majoring in chemistry and biology with a minor in Spanish. A graduate of East Limestone High School, she was born in Huntsville and raised in the Harvest community. Her parents are native Puerto Ricans, and the family settled in North Alabama after her father was hired at NASA.

"Maria has often taken the initiative, on her own, to support and be an advocate on behalf of UAH whenever she has the opportunity," said Delois H. Smith, Vice President of Diversity. "Maria and HSO have fully embraced what we all try to do: be an ambassador and representative for UAH wherever we go. The Office of Diversity is pleased to partner and support these efforts on behalf of UAH."

"During visits to island high schools, we show a Spanish version of the general UAH admissions video, filmed and edited by members of HSO. Also, we cover several aspects of a college education including the application process, the ACT/SAT exam, and financial aid, as well as highlight the numerous internship, co-op, and research opportunities available to UAH students," said Torres.

Additionally, HSO was contacted by two radio stations on the island regarding the group’s visit. "They talked to us about UAH and the purpose of our visit," Torres said. "They asked students and professors to speak on a live broadcast. This was a great opportunity to publicize the university during the trip."

"I believe the Hispanic Student Organization at UAH definitely made an impact at each school we visited," Torres said. "Also, the UAH students traveling with us benefitted from the experience of being exposed to the government and educational system in Puerto Rico, as well as the island culture. This allows students to gain new perspectives and ideas regarding college education."
WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

How do you define diversity? What are you doing at your organization or in your community to promote diversity and inclusion? What are the benefits of a diverse learning and/or work environment?

Write to us. We’d love to share your thoughts, observations, and suggestions in our next issue. Remember to include your name, address, and if you are a UAH alumnus, your class year.

Please email us: diversity@uah.edu