



# Advancing Excellence

Update From the Development & Alumni Relations Office  
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 The University of Texas at Austin  
Jackson School of Geosciences

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 JACKSON SCHOOL OF  
GEOSCIENCES AT THE  
UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS  
AT AUSTIN

### On the Cover

Cenote Calcuch near the village of Sabacche in Yucatan, Mexico by Professor Bayani Cardenas



## DEAR FRIENDS AND ALUMNI OF THE JACKSON SCHOOL,



We have had a truly tremendous year at the Jackson School of Geosciences! Faculty in all of our units are engaged in important and newsworthy research and our students are finding success in their academic and career endeavors. This fall, the Jackson School officially became a partner in the Kay Bailey Hutchison Energy Center, which will open many learning and networking opportunities for students interested in all things energy.

Thanks to the generosity of so many of you, the energetic leadership of our Chief Development Officer Andrew West, and the efforts of our dedicated development and alumni relations team, the Jackson School just wrapped its second-most successful fundraising year in the School's history, raising just over \$30 million! A third of that represents in-kind corporate donations of cutting-edge tools and instrumentation. This team is making remarkable strides as we enter the final stretch of the What Starts Here campaign. I feel confident that, with your help, we will significantly exceed our What Starts Here campaign goal.

This past spring, we focused our "40 Hours for the Forty Acres" crowdfunding campaign on a new building at the White Family Outdoor Learning Center to serve

as a classroom and staging site for the wide range of research and educational activities happening on the property. I am thrilled to share that we raised more than \$850,000 for the improvements and have already started the design and construction processes for the new facility. I hope to share pictures with all of you next year!

We continue to see significant undergraduate enrollment increases in our core GEO programs. Undergraduate majors are up 8% over Fall 2023 and 48% over Fall 2022, with many students attracted to our interdisciplinary environmental science program. We launched a new Climate System Science major this Fall to flesh out options in General Geology, Geophysics and Hydrology. The world needs geoscientists to address the energy and natural resource demands of the future, to improve prediction of environmental changes, natural hazards and climate change impacts, and to enable resilience and sound decision-making in the face of all of these challenges. We are committed to offering the best possible education for all of our students and to enabling their future leadership.

Working together, the future of the school is bright! I hope you will or join us for our 20th Anniversary of the Jackson School event in April 2025. Stay connected with us and let us know your story! Join us for a coffee, a football game or a campus visit. We truly appreciate all you do to support the Jackson School, our students, faculty and programs!

Hook 'em!



*Claudia Mora, Dean*

# WHITE FAMILY OUTDOOR LEARNING CENTER BECOMES MORE ACCESSIBLE

## Donation Will Fund New Indoor Pavilion

For the past five years, Jackson School of Geosciences students have had access to 266 acres of beautiful Hill Country wilderness to use as their outdoor classroom. Concepts that are taught in presentations and labs in the Jackson School building are brought to life just an hour's drive from campus at the White Family Outdoor Learning Center in Dripping Springs.

Complete with rocky pasture, savannah, and a section of South Onion Creek, the property is a geosciences student's textbook come to life. Something it doesn't have, however, is bathrooms, a water fountain, or indoor space of any kind. While geoscientists are known to spend weeks in the field, this outdoor classroom space is meant to be easily accessible to students of all levels. A complementary indoor space is crucial.

Through their generous gift of over \$770,000 to the Jackson School, Jereld and Joy McQueen are making this needed addition to the White Family Outdoor Learning Center a reality. Jereld McQueen, who graduated from The University of Texas at Austin with a B.S. in Geology in 1961, and a master's in 1963, said he has always had an affinity for field courses. In fact, he also funds a Jackson School endowment that pays for students' field experiences.

"I'm a strong believer in geologists being out in the field, doing their work. ... I believe it's a very integral part of being a geoscientist," he said. "This field exposure is usually restricted to those students who attend the field camp courses, but now, most of the students cycling through the Jackson School could have some opportunity to experience the field work environment."

McQueen knew Leslie White, who passed away in 2024, and his wife, Dianne. The couple gave their ranch to the school in 2018 to become this outdoor classroom.

After McQueen graduated with his master's degree in 1963, he moved to

Corpus Christi to work for Humble Oil. There was a real camaraderie among the geologists working there, McQueen remembers. Les White was one of those geologists, and he and McQueen became friends.

While they lost touch over the years, they would cross paths every so often. McQueen also remembers learning of the Whites' donation of their property to the Jackson School.

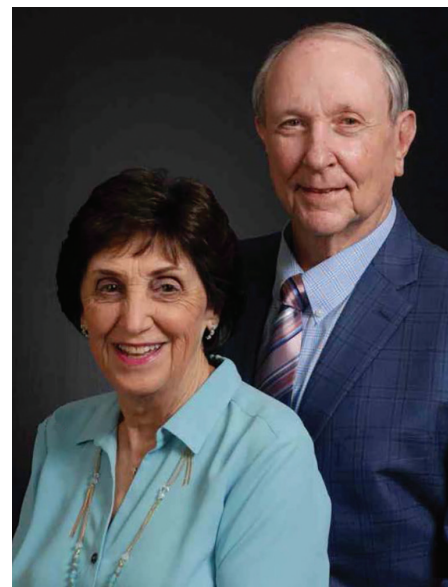
"When I read of Les and Dianne's contribution, I said, wow. I was really proud of that. That was something that could be truly useful for the Jackson School—that they have all the property to do (field work) properly. So I'm hoping that (this addition) will come to fruition through time," McQueen said.

For the 40 Hours for the Forty Acres fundraising campaign this spring, the Jackson School chose this pavilion as its priority project. Almost immediately, the McQueens agreed to provide a significant donation for the building, and the \$700,000 funding requirement was met—and then exceeded—within the 40 hours.

Claudia Mora, dean of the Jackson School, said that the McQueens' gift will enhance what is already a treasured space among geosciences students, faculty members and researchers.

"The pavilion at the White Family Outdoor Learning Center will provide a much-needed space for students to escape the elements and synthesize what they have learned out in the field. What is already considered a special space at the Jackson School will become even more integral to our students' learning experience," she said.

McQueen has never been out to the property, but envisions that this new indoor facility will serve as a headquarters for its operations, paired with classroom space and storage space for sensitive instruments and equipment. Of course, it will be climate-controlled, which will be



*Jereld and Joy McQueen are making a needed addition to the White Family Outdoor Learning Center.*

key during harsh summer days, and have bathrooms and a kitchenette.

As a master's student studying geology, McQueen was a teaching assistant for the junior and senior field courses. He remembers doing field work at the Marathon Uplift in West Texas with the senior class. They would spend the days climbing the mountains, describing the formations, and trying not to get dehydrated. The group would then return to the ranch where they were staying and all jump in the large horse trough to cool down. That was the big event of the day, he remembers.

Much later in his life, he was on vacation in the San Juan Mountains in Colorado fishing for trout. Suddenly, a large group of geoscientists came to his fishing spot. It turns out it was a group of GEO 660 students on field camp. "Jackson School geoscientists are all over the world," he said.





Students explore the White Family Outdoor Learning Center. Photo by the Jackson School.

## BUILDING STUDENTS IN THE FIELD

### McQueen's Vision for Accessible Field Work

In the field, one gathers data which is often partially hidden or weathered— outcrops are not continuous. One must then properly describe the data. But to tell the whole story, because the earth is like one giant jigsaw puzzle, one must put the puzzle together with broken and/or missing pieces. To put the puzzle together, the student must learn to critically think, that is to think logically, be pragmatic, open-minded and flexible. Additionally, the student must learn to visualize in three dimensions to see the entire story as their data is sparse and incomplete. The student must apply these techniques to problem solving by collecting their data, evaluating the data quality, interpreting the results, and make sensible predictions from the limited data. Only then the student can see the whole story. If the students can acquire these techniques, they will be helpful to them for the rest of their careers regardless of what program they decide to pursue.

I firmly believe that these concepts, which I learned at the University of Texas geology school, helped me in my pursuits during my entire career. I was strongly impacted by some of the professors at that time, such as R.E. Boyer, W. Muehlberger, W.C. Bell and S. Clabaugh. They left a major impression on how important critical thinking and 3-D visualization were to problem solving, and they guided and trained me in the field, laboratory and classroom.

The easily accessible White Family Outdoor Learning Center with the new facility will help the Jackson School professors to be successful in teaching the students data gathering, analyzing the data and using critical thinking to solve the problems that confronts them. These techniques will lead to sensible and successful conclusions, and at the same time, they will have fun and the satisfaction of accomplishments.

– *Jereld McQueen, B.S. '61, M.S. '63*

“I’m a strong believer in geologists being out in the field, doing their work. I believe it’s a very integral part of being a geoscientist.”

**JERELD MCQUEEN**



# FROM THE CORE TO THE COSMOS



*The Jackson School offers degrees that combine rigorous classes, fieldwork experience, and opportunities to conduct research with award-winning faculty and scientists.*

The Jackson School of Geosciences is one of the largest and most prestigious geosciences institutions in the world. We lead the way in geoscience education and have strong ties to a global research network and industry partners.

The Jackson School solves complex problems across Texas, the globe, and our universe. We investigate fundamental questions about how Earth systems work and seek to apply our knowledge for the benefit of humankind.

The Jackson School offers degrees that combine rigorous classes, fieldwork experience, and opportunities to conduct research with award-winning faculty and scientists. This real-world experience helps prepare students for successful careers where they can create, innovate and lead.

With your help, this next generation of geoscientists will be equipped to change the world.

# 20 YEARS

Jackson School of Geosciences



*Save the Date*  
April 3-5, 2025  
Austin, Texas

## *Celebrate, Innovate, Inspire*

# JACKSON SCHOOL PRIORITIES

## Innovating From the Core

Fostering cutting-edge research and innovation is the cornerstone of the Jackson School's mission.

### Key Investment Areas

- Aggressively pursue high-risk, high-return research initiatives
- Develop a strong pipeline of future geoscientists through programs like GeoFORCE Texas
- Understand the impact and societal relevance of natural disasters through programs like Rapid Response
- Lead the State of Texas, the nation, and the world through the energy transition

## Enhancing Graduate Student Support

The Jackson School has some of the most sought after and competitive master's and doctoral programs in the country. Recruiting the best and the brightest graduate students to work alongside our renowned faculty and scientists on the critical research needed to solve society's greatest challenges is key to our success and has earned us top ranking as one of the best geology programs in the United States.

### Key Investment Areas

- Double the number of fellowships to recruit and support top-tier graduate students
- Invest in critical interdisciplinary programs like the Energy and Earth Resources M.S. degree
- Drive access to professional development opportunities and prepare students for successful careers

## Unlocking Undergraduate Student Potential

As a top-tier geosciences program, the Jackson School is positioned to attract and recruit high-achieving students.

### Key Investment Areas

- Build scholarship and excellence funds to support research and academic pursuits
- Create real-world experiences by enhancing our world-class fieldwork programs
- Develop the geoscience leaders of tomorrow by elevating initiatives such as the Jackson Scholars and Undergraduate Honors programs

## Investing in Faculty and Research

Research is at the core of what the Jackson School does. Providing opportunities to work at the leading edge of scientific discovery attracts top notch faculty, scientists and students and ensures the Jackson School remains a preeminent scientific institution.

### Key Investment Areas

- Support outstanding faculty and researchers through the establishment of endowed fellowships, professorships and chairs
- Enhance the capabilities of the University of Texas Institute for Geophysics and the Bureau of Economic Geology to remain among the premier research organizations in the world
- Endow resources to secure and maintain the critical tools needed for scientific breakthroughs



# EVENTS



## ALUMNI RECEPTION AMERICAN GEOPHYSICAL UNION 2024

Wednesday, December 11  
12 p.m.–2 p.m.



## ALUMNI RECEPTION DURING NAPE SUMMIT 2025

Thursday, February 6

Visit [www.jsg.utexas.edu/alumni/events-calendar](http://www.jsg.utexas.edu/alumni/events-calendar) to learn about these events and to stay informed about other upcoming events and activities.



## ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT DAX MCDAVID, M.A. CLASS OF 2006

Dax McDavid has been involved with the Jackson School family in numerous capacities over the past 20 years. He earned both his bachelor's and master's degrees from the Jackson School, and he has remained an active member of the Jackson School community since graduation. Following the completion of his master's degree in 2006, Dax proudly served on the Friends and Alumni Network Board, recruiting students and promoting new initiatives at the school. In that role, he also mentored students, a passion he continues to actively pursue. Dax is currently an ambassador for the new Student and Alumni Network, which connects students with alumni for career and personal development advice to help students navigate potential career paths and build their professional networks.

One of the most important things you can do is find a good mentor," Dax said. "This person needs to be someone you look up to, respect and feel comfortable asking many questions. Having an experienced person in the industry to turn to, particularly someone you trust and admire, is invaluable."

Building the foundation for his future success, Dax worked as a research assistant at the Bureau of Geology while pursuing his undergraduate degree. He started his career as a geoscientist at Stalker Energy, where he worked for 10 years. In 2013, he joined Brigham Minerals, where

he progressed into various leadership positions, eventually becoming Senior Vice President of Exploration. In 2019, Dax played a critical role in Brigham Minerals' evolution from a privately funded startup to a successful publicly traded company. Dax also played a key role in leading Brigham Minerals through a corporate merger with Sitio Royalties in 2022. At Sitio, he currently serves as the Executive Vice President of Corporate Development, a role in which he oversees the geoscience team and pursues new venture opportunities.

Over the last 20 years, while advancing his career and raising a family, Dax has continued to be a vital part of the Jackson School community. As a current member of the Advisory Council, he helps guide the school's vision and direction. Dax and his wife Kristen, who is also a University of Texas graduate, feel a strong connection to the university and to the Jackson School, which inspired them to establish a scholarship endowment.

"The Jackson School is a special place that profoundly impacted my education, profession, and life. It's best in class, and we want to keep it that way," he said, "Our family is happy to support the Jackson School and to ensure that future geoscientists have what they need to succeed."



Steve and Kathy Weiner, right, visit with John Jeffers and his daughter Cecilia at the Scholars Luncheon.



Alumnus, right, Izaak Ruiz (B.S. '17, M.S. '19), right, talks with a student at the annual Career Fair about job opportunities.



Robert Kent (B.S. '72) evaluates a poster at the Student Research Symposium.



The Scott Petty family gathers at the Evening of Thanks to honor and welcome Mr. Petty into the Hall of Distinction.



Holly and Ben Lucas (B.S. '10) are welcomed into the Barrow Founders Circle by Dean Claudia Mora.



Professor Emeritus Mark Cloos chats with Nysha Chaderton (M.S. '05, Ph.D. '09) at the annual tailgate.

## UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

**54%**  
female

**46%**  
male

**347 Students**

### Undergraduate Majors, Fall Semester

207

2020

219

2021

234

2022

322

2023

347

2024

### Distribution by Majors

Geological Sciences, Entry-level/Undeclared .....	6%
B.A. Geological Sciences .....	7%
B.S. Geological Sciences	
General Geology .....	33%
Geophysics .....	9%
Hydrology and Water Resources .....	3%
Climate System Science .....	2%
Teaching .....	1%
B.S. Environmental Science, Entry-level .....	26%
B.S. Environmental Science, Geological Sciences ...	5%
B.S. Geosystems Engineering .....	7%

## SCHOOL STATISTICS

**55**

Faculty members

**78**

Research faculty

**146**

Research staff and  
postdoctoral researchers

**5000 ALUMNI**

**50 states**

**51 countries**

UPDATED NOVEMBER 2024

## GRADUATE STUDENTS

**Geosciences**

**78%**  
Ph.D.

**22%**  
master's

**52%**  
male

**48%**  
female

**177 Students**

**46%** Non-Texas residents

**29%** International

**25%** Texas residents

## Energy and Earth Resources

Students in the Energy and Earth Resources Graduate Program pursue multidisciplinary studies in areas of geosciences, engineering, finance, economics and policy.

**54%**  
male

**46%**  
female

**48 Students**

**19%** Non-Texas residents

**38%** International

**44%** Texas residents

## Graduate School Rankings

**#2 in Geology**

*U.S. News & World Report*

**#3 in Paleontology**

*U.S. News & World Report*

**#5 in Geophysics & Seismology**

*U.S. News & World Report*


*Rankings are from 2023, the most recent year these disciplines were ranked.*

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## MAXIMIZE YOUR IMPACT

The University of Texas at Austin and the Jackson School of Geosciences have several philanthropic opportunities that can significantly increase your impact on students and research on the Forty Acres

### Texas Challenge

The University of Texas at Austin educates the future leaders of Texas, our nation and the world. But recruiting high-potential students gets more challenging each year as top universities offer more financial incentives. Strong scholarship packages ensure that UT can compete with other universities to recruit the best and brightest students. With your support, our students can become future leaders who will reach their full potential.

If you've been considering a gift to support students, now is the time. **You can double your impact through the Texas Challenge.** Make a gift to create a scholarship endowment and your gift will be **matched dollar-for-dollar** to support high-potential Texas students from middle- and low-income families.

### Rapid Response

Rapid Response is the brainchild of Jamie Austin, Ph.D., a senior research professor in the Jackson School's Institute for Geophysics.

"There is no more societally relevant research activity than learning from, and learning to live with, natural disasters," Austin said.

But many research opportunities are missed because of how difficult it is to find research funding on the fly. The Rapid Response Program, an initiative of the Jackson School of Geosciences at The University of Texas at Austin, funds this critical work. **In June 2021, Austin put up a \$1 million match for any gift to the Rapid Response Program. Help us prepare the next generation of geoscientists by making your gift to this critical initiative today!**

### Legacy Challenge

You can make an impact today, and a lasting one in the future, by participating in the Jackson School of Geosciences Legacy Challenge. **Document a new planned gift of \$100,000 or more, and an immediate donation will be made to the department, program, project or area of your choosing within the school.** Contact us today to join the challenge!

### GeoFORCE

Thanks to an anonymous donor, the Jackson School has established a challenge match of \$750,000 for GeoFORCE through December 2024. Funds will support programmatic expenses for the GeoFORCE Texas summer academies and annual programs. The generous donation was gifted to GeoFORCE in an effort to diversify funding. **Eligible donations will be matched from new corporate sponsors, individual donors or by "in kind" donations that offset programmatic costs.**

*For more information or to get involved today with these exciting initiatives, please contact the Jackson School development team ([development@jsg.utexas.edu](mailto:development@jsg.utexas.edu)).*

# DEVELOPMENT AND ALUMNI RELATIONS CONTACTS

Meet Your Development and Alumni Relations Team



**ANDREW WEST**  
Chief Development Officer  
*awest@jsg.utexas.edu*  
(512) 471-6010



**MARCIA INGER**  
Senior Director of  
Development, Gift and  
Estate Planning  
*mingernav@austin.utexas.edu*  
(512) 663-3274



**ELIZABETH GIBSON**  
Director of Major Gifts  
*egbison@jsg.utexas.edu*  
(512) 232-8052



**NICK WARRINGTON**  
Director of Major Gifts  
*nwarrington@jsg.utexas.edu*  
(512) 472-1661



**KRISTEN TUCEK**  
Director of Corporate  
Relations  
*ktucek@jsg.utexas.edu*  
(512) 471-2223



**COURTNEY VLETAS**  
Director of Donor and  
Alumni Engagement  
*cvletas@jsg.utexas.edu*  
(512) 232-4824



**GEORGIA SANDERS**  
Administrative Operations  
Manager  
*gsanders@jsg.utexas.edu*  
(512) 471-1282



**NINA STAEBEN**  
Donor and Alumni  
Engagement Coordinator  
*nstaeben@jsg.utexas.edu*  
(703) 727-9566



**CLAUDIA GARCIA**  
Development Associate  
*cgarza@jsg.utexas.edu*  
(512) 471-0120

**New Job?  
New Adventure?  
Share Your News!**

Your Jackson School family wants to hear from you. Visit <https://www.jsg.utexas.edu/alumni-update> to update your contact information.

GET CONNECTED. STAY **HOOKED.**