

# DB's First Black Faculty Member Is Proud of the School – Then and Now

By Erika E. Durham, Public Affairs

At first glance it looks more like a museum than the lobby of a dental clinic. The walls are adorned with photos, news clippings, honors and degrees. Upon closer inspection of the exhibits, the message is clear — Zeb F. Poindexter Jr., D.D.S., first black graduate of The University of Texas Dental Branch at Houston, is proud of his alma mater.

He is proud not only of the school that educated him 50 years ago, but also of the one that exists today — an institution eager to educate anyone, regardless of race, creed or nationality. Today the Dental Branch boasts an extremely comfortable learning environment for everyone who attends, something Poindexter didn't have the privilege of enjoying, but did have a role in creating. And for that he is proud as well.

As the Dental Branch celebrates its Centennial year, Poindexter's story and his successful struggle to bring the importance of diversity to the Dental Branch provides an essential piece to the portrait of the 100-year-old school.

Poindexter, 75, was raised in Fort Worth by Lenora Camelia Poindexter, "who wouldn't let us bring home any grade lower than a C," he said. Under his mother's strict rules, he learned the value of education. He went on to complete his Bachelor of Science degree at Wiley College and received his master's degree from Texas Southern University before being recruited to the

Dental Branch in 1952.

As one of two black dental students admitted that year (the other was Moritz Craven, D.D.S., husband of UT System Regent Judith Craven, M.D.) Poindexter admits there were times he encountered the negatives that came with segregation.

But even in those situations, such as when he was not allowed to attend his freshman or sophomore picnics, he still learned to focus on the positives of his experience.



Zeb F. Poindexter III, left, and Zeb F. Poindexter Jr., the first black father and son to graduate from The University of Texas Dental Branch at Houston.

"Overall, on a day-to-day basis, I was treated excellently by the faculty and my peers," Poindexter said.

After graduating in 1956, he became the first black faculty member at the Dental Branch and was later recruited by then dean, John Victor Olson, D.D.S., to serve as the dean of Minority Recruiting. In that position Poindexter was able to use the opportunity given to him and share it with other minority students.

Not only did Poindexter work tirelessly to bring diversity to the Dental Branch by recruiting students from his own neighborhood, but he also made strides in diversity throughout the Houston community. He was the first black admitted into the Houston District Dental Society and for years held leading roles in several civic organizations.

All the while Poindexter maintained a commitment to his predominantly black patients, who had a limited number of places to seek quality oral care. Until 2000 he continued to operate his private practice on Cullen Blvd. The practice now belongs to his son, Zeb Poindexter III, D.D.S..

Zeb Poindexter III, a 1984 graduate of the Dental Branch, began assisting his father at the clinic at the age of 12, when he fell in love with the profession. They are the first black father and son to graduate from the Dental Branch with D.D.S. degrees.

The elder Poindexter, who retired from fulltime dental practice in 2000, is well respected in the Houston community. In 1991 he was nominated by the Greater Houston Dental Society for the Texas Academy of General Dentistry's Dentist of the Year award. He is a fellow in the International College of Dentists and an outstanding alumnus of the Dental Branch.

In retirement, he enjoys spending time with his wife, three children, 11 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. ★

## The Dental Branch, the HSC and the TMC: An Historic Connection

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ity to lead and delegate responsibility in an effective manner.

"Dr. Olson's deanship crossed three decades and exemplified outstanding leadership," said Bryant Boutwell, Dr.P.H., associate dean for Community Affairs at the UT Medical School and well-known historian. "Many faculty members referred to him as their quarterback, as he was a role model for listening and involving others in the strategic thinking and implementation process.

"The UT System's request that he help start UT San Antonio's new dental program in 1969 and then serve as interim president of

our health science center in Houston speaks volumes to the respect he gained statewide as a leader," Boutwell added.

Charles LeMaistre, M.D., former vice chancellor for Health Affairs at the UT System and former president of UT M. D. Anderson Cancer Center, described Olson as quiet but dedicated. "He was highly respected in Houston and in the Texas Medical Center."

Olson's position at the health science center established the Dental Branch's reputation as an institution with a collaborative spirit willing to step outside of its walls for the improvement of oral health and overall

health.

Boutwell reiterated how much the relationship between the Dental Branch and the Health Science Center should be appreciated and celebrated this year.

"UT Health Science Center should reflect with great pride on what it means to have the longest-lived program of higher education in Houston (the Dental Branch)," Boutwell said. "The Dental Branch's deans not only shaped the dental profession in significant ways, they have provided key leadership in the early development of the Texas Medical Center and our health science center. Today

our Dental Branch and health science center share a mutually beneficial relationship that is a winning combination for students, faculty and the community alike."

The prestige of being associated with the health science center and the largest medical center in the world is a very powerful tool for the recruitment of faculty and students, Flaitz said. "By being part of something bigger than ourselves, the Dental Branch has the ability to impact the future direction of oral health in ways that other dental schools can only dream about — this is both our privilege and responsibility." ★

## UT Health Science Center Brings Funding Concerns to Texas Legislature

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"The University of Texas Dental Branch at Houston is 'changing the landscape of oral health' for the benefit of all Texans," says Catherine M. Flaitz, D.D.S., dean of the Dental Branch. "However, it is imperative that the academic landscape from which we educate, research and serve changes as well.

"As a practicing dental specialist, educator, clinical researcher and dean of this great institution, I understand the limitations of our aging facility from every angle. We have a need that must be addressed to ensure that we continue meeting the needs of others. A new building for the Dental Branch will secure the quality of dental education and community oral health in Texas, while increasing opportunities to grow our vital research enterprise."

Two School of Public Health projects include the laboratory space on the Brownsville campus and expansion of the school's main building in Houston. Plans call for a 120,000-square-foot research wing addition to accommodate the Institute for Health Policy, the Center for Health Promotion and Prevention Research, and the Center for Biosecurity and Public Health Preparedness. The addition also will be used for community public health research and education outreach programs.

Health Science Center leaders also seek

funding to recruit internationally known scientists to the Brown Foundation Institute of Molecular Medicine for the Prevention of Human Diseases. "Estimates are that it takes approximately \$1.5 million per scientist — salary, lab, equipment, research techs," explained Elizabeth Gettings, assistant vice president for government relations.

Legislators probably will want to know about progress the health science center has made with the funds received last biennium for recovery from the effects of Tropical Storm Allison. "We have prepared a document that speaks, for example, to where we are in the timeline, what we've spent so far and when all the bonds will be issued," Gettings says.

Issues relating to graduate medical education (GME) also will be on the legislative agenda. "Because we don't have enough residency slots in the state, Texas medical school graduates are leaving to go to other states to do their residencies," says Gettings. "The common wisdom is that most doctors stay where they do their residencies, so we're exporting Texas-educated doctors."

There is also a shortage of qualified nurses in the state. There has not been the increase in funding needed for increasing enrollment in nursing education at the health science center. The health science center has been

working with Sen. Kyle Janek from Houston on this issue.

Gettings thinks that if there is new money of any consequence, it is possible that legislators could stipulate that these moneys be used for specific purposes such as GME and nursing.

There also is a request for funds for the Center for Advanced Imaging at the UT Research Park project with M. D. Anderson. The requested funds will supplement a \$25 million Texas Enterprise Fund grant and assist in the creation of more than 2,200 jobs over the next decade.

State funds accounted for approximately 36 percent of the health science center's FY04 budget. The rest comes from research expenditures, clinical charges, philanthropic gifts, Auxiliary Enterprise and unexpended plant funds, according to Laura D. Smith, associate vice president for finance and legislative affairs.

During the session, faculty and staff from the Health Science Center, among others, will be asked by UT System to comment on — often on a very quick turn-around, says Gettings — legislation that UT System knows or anticipates may have an impact on System or its components. Willerson, the health science center's chief spokesperson before legislative committees, provides additional background for committee members to help

them understand the ramifications of funding the institution's priorities.

Also, faculty with expertise in areas of special interest to the legislature may be asked to testify before specific committees. Gettings says it is likely that child development expert Susan Landry, Ph.D., of the Medical School's Center for Improving the Readiness of Children for Learning and Education, and Steven Kelder, Ph.D., of the School of Public Health's Center for Health Promotion and Prevention Research may be called, given the emphases on early childhood education and childhood obesity, respectively.

"People are recognizing that we have some real experts at the health science center regarding the health professions and medical research, which will serve us well down the road," she says.

As the legislative session progresses, health science center leaders will follow most closely the work of the Appropriations, Higher Education and Public Health committees in the Texas House of Representatives and in the Senate, Finance, Education, and the Health and Human Services committees. Leaders also will monitor State Affairs committees in both chambers, which receive a broad spectrum of legislation.

For more information on legislative action, visit <http://www.capitol.state.tx.us>. ★