

IN THE LOOP

A publication for College of Computing and Digital Media alumni

DEPAUL
UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF COMPUTING
AND DIGITAL MEDIA



Assistant Professor John Psathas (CDM MFA '11) and senior Ryan Harvey watch a scene on the monitor at Cinespace Chicago during the filming of "Bernadette." Read more on page 2. Photo credit: Taylor Gillen.

Spring 2016

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THE AGE OF

ADOLESCENCE



Photo credit: Taylor Gillen

Summer jobs. Teen angst. Unrequited crushes. The upcoming film "Bernadette" embraces these timeless themes as awkward protagonist Archie Kinsler struggles to earn the affections of the title character, an alluring 17-year-old French lifeguard. Along the way, he engages in a risky bargain with fellow Forest Lake Park District employee Dixon, the resident lothario and a local legend. Various other jocks, stoners, nerds and parental figures round out the cast of characters who together capture hope and ennui in suburban Chicago circa 1994.

Project Bluelight, CDM's professional motion picture production company, green-lighted the film, which was co-written by Assistant Professor John Psathas (CDM MFA

'11) and Lecturer Patrick Wimp (CDM MFA '09). Both faculty members served as lead producers; additionally, Psathas directed "Bernadette" and Wimp served as cinematographer.

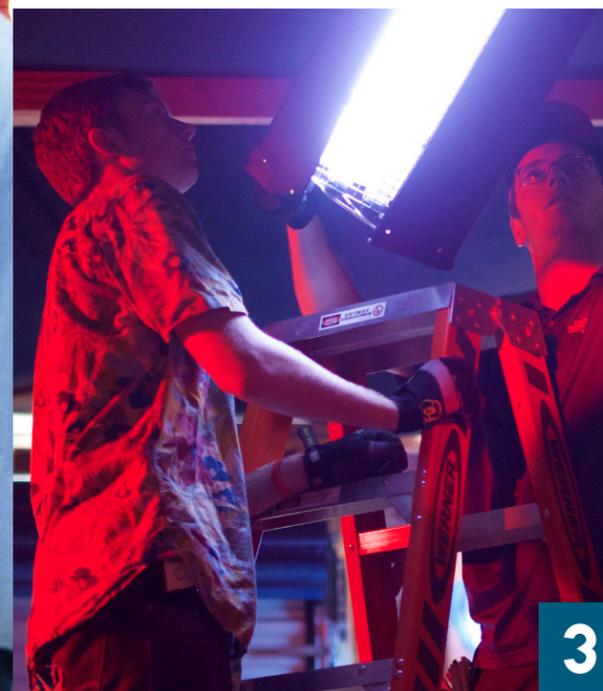
For the 15 students enrolled in the six-month Project Bluelight course, "Bernadette" offered an exciting opportunity to work on the production of a feature-length film. "In general, the best and most surreal part of making a movie is watching your words come to life visually," Wimp says. "But on this film, by far the best part was seeing the growth of our student team from the early days of the project to the final wrap of production. It was incredibly rewarding and made me feel extremely proud." Here is a glimpse behind the scenes of "Bernadette."



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2



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1 Boom operator Kyle Eskra, a junior, prepares for a scene on location at the carnival. Photo credit: James Psathas

2 Second assistant camera Josue Ortiz, a junior, gets ready to clap the slate on location in Chicago. Photo credit: James Psathas

3 Key grip Sam Condon, a junior, and electrician Will Brunker, a senior, rig a Kino light to the ceiling for the Hawaiian party scene. Photo credit: James Psathas

4 The crew gets ready for a scene on location in Chicago. Photo credit: James Psathas

5 Patrick Wimp (CDM MFA '09), cinematographer and lead producer, checks the frame before a light-hearted scene between two supporting characters. Photo credit: Taylor Gillen

A DESIGN OASIS IN DOWNTOWN

On one wall, a whimsical rhinoceros floats through the air on a parachute. On another wall, a dramatic black-and-white poster advertises a Death Cab for Cutie benefit concert for President Barack Obama. Colorful birds carrying branches in their triangular beaks march across a third wall in a Habitat for Humanity series.

This eclectic collection of work by Lee Zelenak, professional lecturer in the graphic design program, anchored the first exhibition in the Design Gallery, a new space on the Loop Campus dedicated to showcasing the talents of School of Design faculty and students. "With the initiation of the School of Design as its own entity at DePaul, we wanted to make sure that we



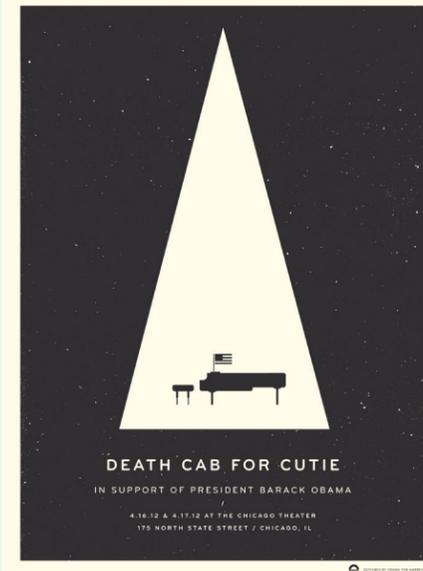
Lee Zelenak

were displaying our best work," explains Professor Dolores Wilber. "It's not only advertising for the faculty and students, it's also facilitating education, enjoyment and culture."

Located on the second floor of the Richard M. and Maggie C. Daley Building, the approximately 600-square-foot room, one of several new spaces acquired by CDM last year, was renovated during the summer and opened in the fall. The gallery features adjustable lighting, audiovisual capabilities, horizontal rails for hanging work and soft, gray chairs that encourage visitors to stay awhile and ponder the pieces. "Design sometimes gets a reputation for being pragmatic in a way that's not creative or interesting," Wilber says. "I thought Zelenak's show was great to open with because it's very expressive."

Although Zelenak isn't primarily a poster designer, he realized that his work for clients such as the Cleveland International Film Festival and Obama 2012 were well suited to the inaugural exhibition. "These are some of the projects I've had the most fun working on," he notes. "I hope students will see that you can play around with your personal interests even when you're working for a client." Several students described the show as eye-opening, telling Zelenak they hadn't realized the full scope of his repertoire.

Heather Quinn, professional lecturer in the School of Design, whose show followed Zelenak's in January, elaborates on this idea. "Students love to see real pieces," she asserts. "When you bring a sample into



Lee Zelenak

class or take students to a gallery, it makes the process much more tangible." Viewing a curated collection in a single location can also inspire students to think about design in broader terms. "Design isn't only about one-offs," Wilber says. "It's important to understand that as a designer, you develop a complex body of work that might include both pragmatic and artistic outcomes."

For her show "Providence," Quinn focused on the idea of visual systems, which she describes as the building blocks of a design concept. Visual systems, such as brand style guides, are a way to organize and grow an identity. Quinn landed on the title "Providence" as a reference to her previous home in Rhode Island, but also as an allusion to DePaul's spiritual identity and her own personal growth. "Providence can mean 'timely preparation for future eventualities,' which is basically a description of visual systems—you're preparing for the future," she explains.

Quinn's providential forecast for the Design Gallery's future is succinct, but ambitious: "It will grow." Student work already appears in various spaces throughout CDM, and it's natural that the Design Gallery could become a central hub for showcasing student design. "This is a big step forward, but we also want to make it better known in the public and around the university," Wilber says. "It's incredibly exciting that we're building a visual center right in the middle of downtown."

The Design Gallery is free and open to the public at 14 E. Jackson Blvd., Room 208. Enter on State Street.



Last year, graduate student Shamil Clay received an email from a frustrated prospective student. "She was supposed to visit campus the next day and had taken a vacation day at work to do so, but the scheduled tour had been unexpectedly cancelled," Clay recalls. "It was 1 a.m. by the time I saw the email, but I responded right away to let her know that I would be happy to take her on a tour." They convened the next day to discuss the master's in digital communication and media arts program, and someone from the CDM Office of Graduate Admission led the prospective student on a tour of the college facilities.

For student ambassadors like Clay, going the extra mile isn't anything unusual; the volunteer position attracts some of CDM's most motivated, engaged and service-minded students. In addition to answering queries from prospective students, the ambassadors also serve on student panels, staff recruitment events and welcome new students at receptions.

"Deciding to attend college or graduate school is a huge financial and time commitment," notes Deliana Escobari, who's pursuing an MS in software engineering. "Prospective students should consider that decision carefully, and one way to do that is by speaking to someone who's going through it." Before enrolling at DePaul, Escobari worried that her technical skills wouldn't be up to par, and it turns out that many prospective students harbor this same fear. "I always tell them, 'DePaul excels at providing you the tools you need to succeed,'" she says. "The degree isn't easy, but you're not going through it alone. Advisors, faculty, teaching assistants and tutors are here to support you."

Of course, the ambassadors themselves contribute to this community of support. Starting as a new student can be especially daunting for those arriving from abroad. Aarzoo Patel, an MS in computer science student from Ahmedabad, India, often offers advice and assistance beyond basic information about the curriculum, campus and professors. "One international student I communicated with didn't have any idea about where to live," Patel remembers. "I helped him find his own place, figure out the leasing and get settled."

Patel also helps students navigate questions about tuition, test scores and living in Chicago. When he's not sure about a specific course question, he'll refer the prospective student to an advisor in CDM's Academic Success Center, but he thinks it's critical that interested students have access to both students and staff. Fellow ambassador Donalisa Gomez, an undergraduate animation major, agrees with his assessment, likening staff advisors to parents and ambassadors to siblings. "Since we're their peers, it's a little less daunting," she explains.

Whether they're hunting down answers for prospective students, leading campus tours or sharing their thoughts on different programs, student ambassadors showcase the university's friendly and welcoming environment. "I wanted to become an ambassador to share why I chose and love CDM," Gomez says. She knows that DePaul won't be the right fit for every prospective student she encounters, and that's okay, too. Regardless of major or degree program, the ambassadors all share an important personality trait. "I just like helping people," Clay says. "I value DePaul, and I want to support it."

Paving the Way in IT Education and Research

On the last day in September, more than 150 people arrived on DePaul's doorsteps from Asia, Australia, Canada, Europe, South America and around the United States. They came with fully charged laptops and open ears, ready for the premier international conference on information technology education and research. Sponsored by the Association for Computing Machinery, SIGITE/RIIT 2015 represented the culmination of three years of increasing conference responsibility for co-chairs Amber Settle and Associate Dean Theresa Steinbach (CSH '88, MBA '90, CDM MS '99, PhD '08), associate professors in the School of Computing (SoC).

While success is never guaranteed, their track record was promising. When Settle and Steinbach served as sponsorship chairs in 2013, the dynamic duo generated twice the dollars of prior years. They introduced new initiatives as programming chairs in 2014, including meta reviews of submitted papers and 10-minute lightning talks for attendees seeking quick feedback on research ideas. This year, Settle and Steinbach continued to shake things up in a positive way by choosing an unconventional keynote speaker: 25-year-old Mike Shannon, the entrepreneur behind Packback, an e-textbook rental company.

"We were a little nervous to see how he would be received," Steinbach recalls. "Unlike previous keynote presenters, he doesn't have a PhD, nor is he a C-level executive from a tech company." But the audience was impressed. Steinbach witnessed many excited

conversations after Shannon spoke, and postconference evaluations confirmed attendees' appreciation of this fresh approach. "You could see why he did so well on 'Shark Tank,'" Settle says, referring to Shannon's dynamic personality and stellar run on ABC's reality TV program for aspiring entrepreneurs.

Shannon's keynote set the tone for the conference's overall theme, "Creating the Future." Settle and Steinbach explain that this theme evokes Chicago's booming start-up scene and its potential impact on the next generation. "We have creative entrepreneurial spaces like 1871 and BLUE1647, and Mayor Rahm Emanuel's tech plan, so we wanted to highlight all the support the city offers to entrepreneurs and look at how we can educate students to take advantage of these types of opportunities," Steinbach notes.

The three papers presented by SoC faculty members carried out the theme by emphasizing student learning and achievement. In "Usability Evaluation: Learning When Method Findings Converge—And When They Don't," Associate Professor Craig Miller discussed the experiences of students in one of his graduate-level human-computer interaction courses. The course introduced students to different methods of evaluating user interfaces, which encompass everything an individual encounters when using a phone, computer or other information device, from the display screen to the keyboard to application pop-ups and so on.

A usability test, which involves direct observation as an individual carries out various tasks, is the most common type of user interface evaluation, but students in Miller's course also practiced other methods. They learned about guideline-based evaluations, external expert evaluators and task-oriented walkthroughs. In addition to conducting evaluations themselves, they compared their results to the findings of other groups and discussed any discrepancies. Miller relied on student evaluations, in-class questions, observation and surveys to assess the effectiveness of this teaching method. "Audience members wanted to know about the logistical issues involved in this course, as well as my takeaways as the instructor," Miller shares. "They were very interested in evaluating usability in the context of a course."

Forty-one percent of the nearly 100 papers submitted to SIGITE were accepted, including "Learning Object-Oriented Programming in Python: Toward an Inventory of Difficulties and Testing Pitfalls," which Miller wrote with Settle and John Lalor (CDM MS '15). As lead author, Miller presented the team's results at the conference, but directed some of the audience's questions to Settle.

This paper developed out of a seemingly simple question: "What programming language should we use for introductory courses?" At DePaul, Python is the preferred language for entry-level computer science courses. "It's a very good language for beginners because of its simplicity, but there are some Python-specific difficulties with it as well," Miller says. The authors of the paper analyzed some of these particular challenges and shared plans for future research.

Along with Steinbach, Settle and Lalor also collaborated on "Evaluating a Linked-Courses Learning Community for

Development Majors," which assessed initial results from a learning community that grouped freshman students together for paired courses and extracurricular activities (see In the Loop, spring 2015). "We found significant differences between our students and the other Introduction to Computer Science students," Settle says. "Students in the learning community felt more supported, which is what we hoped to see." Additionally, the retention rate for those students exceeds that of both the university and CDM.

Lastly, Settle served on a panel that addressed the connections and relationships between computer science and information technology programs. Although students in both programs learn programming, their paths rarely cross in SoC. "Our enrollment can support separate programs," Settle explains. "That isn't always the case at other institutions." Panelists discussed some of the common misperceptions between programs, as well as the importance of employing knowledgeable academic advisors and being observant in the classroom to help guide students to their best fit. The packed room reinforced the urgency of this topic.

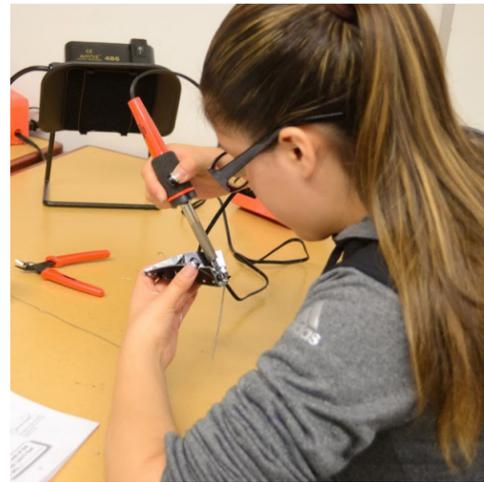
The conference attracted the second-highest number of attendees in SIGITE's 16 years and RIIT's four years. "My favorite part was seeing all our hard work pay off in a glitch-free experience for our attendees," Steinbach shares. While Settle and Steinbach won't hold official conference roles next year, it's likely their impact will reverberate for years to come. "When people think about SIGITE/RIIT, they're going to think of DePaul, not only because we're doing the work to host this conference, but also because we're really trying to contribute to the community," Settle says. "It's been a great experience."



Program chair Deborah Boisvert of the University of Massachusetts at Boston presents the SIGITE 2015 Best Paper award to Jason Hallstrom of Clemson University.



SIGITE Chair Steve Zilora of Rochester Institute of Technology presents Barry Lunt of Brigham Young University with a service award for his dedicated work on behalf of the organization.



Tech Divas

Excitement filled the labs and halls of the CDM building as DePaul hosted more than 50 young women for Chicago's inaugural ChickTech: High School event on the first weekend in November. Volunteers from HerCDM, the college's female empowerment student organization (see In the Loop, fall 2014), assisted students with tech-based workshops and provided operational support during registration, setup, cleanup and meal breaks. The two-day event served as the kickoff for the yearlong ChickTech program, which also offers one-on-one mentoring and summer internships. "Here at CDM, we like being involved with organizations like ChickTech," says Associate Dean and Associate Professor Theresa Steinbach (CSH '88, MBA '90, CDM MS '99, PhD '08). "It allows young women to have hands-on experiences with technology-centric projects in a supportive community."

Student Researchers

Three students from the college presented their research at the DePaul Undergraduate Showcase for Science and Technology on Nov. 7. Muriel Canever worked with Associate Professor James Yu on her project, "An Empirical Study of VoIP Vulnerabilities and Performance," which revealed the vulnerabilities and performance limitations of Voice over Internet Protocol servers. For the project "Investigating the Effects of Majority Voting on CAD Systems: A LIDC Case Study," Miguel Carrazza teamed up with Professor Daniela Stan Raicu to expose how certain types of skewed distributions can have a negative impact on the performance of computer-aided diagnoses. Lastly, Marlon Garcia collaborated with Professor Jane Cleland-Huang and Assistant Professor Alexander Rasin on "TiQi: Towards Natural Language Trace Queries," which outlined how the natural language interface TiQi allows users to articulate queries in their own words.



Nickelodeon Nod

All those hours watching Nickelodeon as a child can really pay off. Senior Dawn Adepoju, an animation major, received the inaugural "What's Your Nickfluence" scholarship, a \$25,000 award from Nickelodeon and Get Schooled, a nonprofit funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Viacom. The cheery short shows Adepoju exploring the power of imagination as she progresses from toddlerhood to adulthood. Watch the short at bit.ly/nickfluence.



Doc Talk

Calling all aspiring documentarians! This fall, the School of Cinematic Arts introduces a new MFA in documentary program. "Our goal is to train ethical documentarians who can develop, produce and distribute films that have a positive impact on their audience," says filmmaker and Professional Lecturer Anuradha Rana, who notes that DePaul's Vincentian mission helped inspire the new degree. The selective program features courses in documentary history, styles and traditions; research and development techniques; technical production aspects and more. Students must complete, publicly screen and defend their thesis project in order to graduate.



Bravo! Bravo!

- Avery Lee (CDM '07) and Bobby Richards' show "Bobby & Iza" won NBC Playground's digital comedy pilot competition.
- Professor Daniela Stan Raicu and Professional Lecturer Denise Nacu received the first CDM Collaborative Research and Creative Activity Grant. They are applying data analytics to 21st-century learning technologies.
- Raicu and Professor Jacob Furst, as well as Assistant Professor Jonathan Gemmell and Professor Bamshad Mobasher, received round III collaboration grants from Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science.
- Computer science graduate student Huu Phuoc Tran, chapter president of Upsilon Pi Epsilon (UPE), an international honor society for the computing and information disciplines, won one of three UPE Executive Council Awards.
- Assistant Professor Devin Bell received CDM's 2015 Excellence in Teaching Award. Bell teaches courses in animation, directing and narrative development.
- The University Research Council at DePaul honored Associate Professor Amber Settle and Assistant Professor Doris Rusch with the 2015 Spirit of Inquiry Award.
- "Speed Dating," which was written and directed by Assistant Professor Meghann Artes and produced through Project Bluelight, CDM's professional motion picture production company, was featured on Short of the Week and was also selected as a Vimeo Staff Pick. The quirky short has been viewed more than 293,000 times on Vimeo.
- Ashley Ruhl (CDM '10), cinematic designer at Telltale Games, was named to Forbes 30 Under 30 in the Games category.

COLORING

OUTSIDE THE LINES



Maggie Acker (CDM '12) holds the distinct privilege of being one of the very first students to graduate from DePaul with a BFA in graphic design. "The degree launched when I was a sophomore, so I transferred over as soon as I could," she remembers. "It was really exciting to be a student during that time, and it's so cool to see how the program has grown since then."

Though Acker entered DePaul as a psychology major, her childhood in Colorado Springs, Colo., reveals an enduring artistic streak. She recalls making her own clothes, experimenting with photography and always having a penchant for design. "I was the type of kid who rearranged my room every six months, trying to find the perfect layout," Acker says. "I loved creating and coming up with new projects."

The summer before her senior year in high school, Acker spent time in Chicago while attending a summer course at Columbia College in fashion design and digital photography. Her brother, who was pursuing a master's in finance at DePaul, encouraged Acker to look at the university. "Immediately, I liked what DePaul stood for," Acker says.

When Acker switched over to the graphic design major, she found a mentor in Professor Dolores Wilber (see page 4). "I owe my love of graphic design in large part to her," Acker says. "Whenever I had doubts about myself as a designer, she helped me rediscover my determination. It was so meaningful to have that support and encouragement from a professor." More recently, Wilber recommended Acker to Associate Dean JoAnne Zielinski, who needed someone to assist with promotional materials for the Project Bluelight film "Sweet 16," and Acker eagerly accepted. "DePaul was such a big part of my life for four years and taught me so much," Acker notes. "I really enjoy giving back when I can."

This philosophy also informs Acker's day-to-day life as a production designer at Sandbox Agency, a communication and marketing agency focused on health care, digital and consumer markets. "I like working on projects that have a purpose because I like to believe in what I produce," Acker says. She has worked on videos, motion graphics, presentations and other collateral for clients in a variety of fields.

At Sandbox, Acker thrives in a hybrid role. As a production designer, she works closely with art directors to execute designs; she also serves as a lead designer and presentation specialist on other projects. Unlike graphic design majors from other institutions, Acker stepped into the position with experience in both animation and video production. She quickly saw how those strengths were assets in the field. "You don't always get those classes in traditional graphic design programs, but because of the BFA program, I was able to explore those areas at DePaul," she says.

When Acker hits a creative wall, she turns to her co-workers. "That's one of the best ways to find inspiration." Other times, she'll put the work down for a bit, walk through her adopted city and return with a new vision. "I like to play around with different ideas," she explains. "It reminds me of a puzzle—you may not see where the piece goes right away, but the answer is always there."

TAKE FIVE WITH MAGGIE ACKER

- Favorite colors:** Yellow and teal
- Best advice:** If you can laugh at it, you can live with it.
- Alternative career path:** Nutritionist
- Favorite times of year:** Christmas and spring
- Best way to beat the brainstorming blues:** Go for a run.



PLOTTING A PATH FORWARD

Greg Zanotti can't wait for the future. The senior, double-majoring in computer science and mathematics, talks animatedly about his interest in the developing field of general artificial intelligence (AI). "These algorithms take in any input and produce meaningful output with little to no prior direction," he explains. "For example, researchers at the University of Maryland helped a robot learn to cook by letting it 'watch' YouTube videos."

Zanotti hopes to obtain a PhD in deep neural networks and machine learning, a subfield of AI that uses algorithms to learn and make predictions from data. Noting that his favorite courses at DePaul "have really challenged me intellectually," Zanotti looks forward to an equally rigorous graduate school curriculum. "I value the empowering feeling of understanding that only comes as a result of hard work and study," he says.

Outside the classroom, Zanotti works as a junior software developer at Marquette Partners, a proprietary trading firm. At DePaul, he has held leadership positions in the

Student Government Association, the Student Finance Association, STATCOM and other student groups. Double-majoring in two colleges requires a certain degree of finesse and dedication, but Zanotti can't get enough. In fact, in his free time, he enjoys reading books on advanced topics in AI and mathematics.

Zanotti's fascination with AI extends beyond its theoretical applications. "This is only the beginning of an awesome process of innovation, one that I hope culminates in general social improvement," he says. "With all the gigantic, complex problems in the world today, it's likely we'll need some help to solve them. I think artificial intelligence provides realistic solutions and a path forward."

Interested in supporting ambitious and passionate students like Greg Zanotti? Consider making a gift to one of the funds below.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Premiere Film Festival

A celebration and awards show honoring student work in cinema and animation
June 3
6:30 p.m.
Music Box Theatre
3733 N. Southport Ave.

Graphic Design BFA Capstone Exhibition

A showcase of work from graduating seniors in graphic design
June 10-12
Time TBD
2956 Gallery & Event Space
2956 N. Clark St.

DePaul Game Capstone Showcase

A showcase of work from computer game development students
June 10
6:30 p.m.
Daley Building
14 E. Jackson Blvd., Fifth Floor