



URBAN LEADERSHIP

DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

A DECADE OF DEVELOPING LEADERS TO CREATE
CHANGE AND BUILD STRONGER COMMUNITIES

2014 - **2024**

THE ORIGIN

Over a decade ago, shortly after founding MetroMorphosis, Raymond Jetson saw an additional need in the community. As a participant in numerous leadership initiatives throughout his career, Jetson realized that most of the leaders in place were effective and well intentioned, but were not equipped at addressing the challenges and opportunities faced by communities of color. While MetroMorphosis had various change efforts in the works, there was nothing focused squarely on refining and developing leadership skills in change makers throughout the community who could make a difference in the urban experience.

Jetson recognized a different approach was needed to supply this type of leadership and develop a steady pipeline of men and women specially trained to tackle the challenges faced by communities throughout Baton Rouge. It was 2014 when Jetson developed The Urban Leadership Development Initiative (ULDI).

A decade later in 2024, ULDI has evolved into a 10-month program that engages select fellows in a combination of thoughtful dialogue, dynamic guest speakers, and personal encounters aimed at developing them to be adept at facing many of those challenges.



THE EARLY YEARS

The first cohort of The Urban Leadership Development Initiative (ULDI) launched in 2014. In addition to Jetson's guidance, the initial program curriculum was developed by Dr. Lori Martin, LSU professor and Associate Dean, and Chris Tyson who was a professor at the LSU Law School at the time. The program was based on a series of graduate-school-level readings on subjects like education, healthcare, housing, economics, and various aspects of life relevant to the Black experience. The cohort was responsible for specific readings and subsequent discussions on how the practice of leadership intersected with the challenges of inner city neighborhoods. As ULDI progressed, Sherreta Harrison—an alumni member and later part of the MetroMorphosis team—became a major driver in updating and refining the curriculum. As Chief Executive Catalyst and Co-Lead, she continues in that role today.



For the first cohort, key community members were invited based on their potential to contribute and make an impact on the future. While the group was open to new ideas, enthusiastic about the experience, and the majority completed the entire 10-month program, there was one problem. Most of the group soon left Baton Rouge for jobs in other markets. With the intent of training change agents who would stay in our community, the second cohort was chosen based on the caveat that they indeed planned to remain in Baton Rouge for their foreseeable future. Strict participation and attendance mandates were implemented to ensure only serious candidates completed the course. ULDI gained traction with the second cohort beginning with 18 and graduating 10 to the alumni network, most of whom not only remain in Baton Rouge a decade later, but are also actively driving change.



A UNIQUE EXPERIENCE

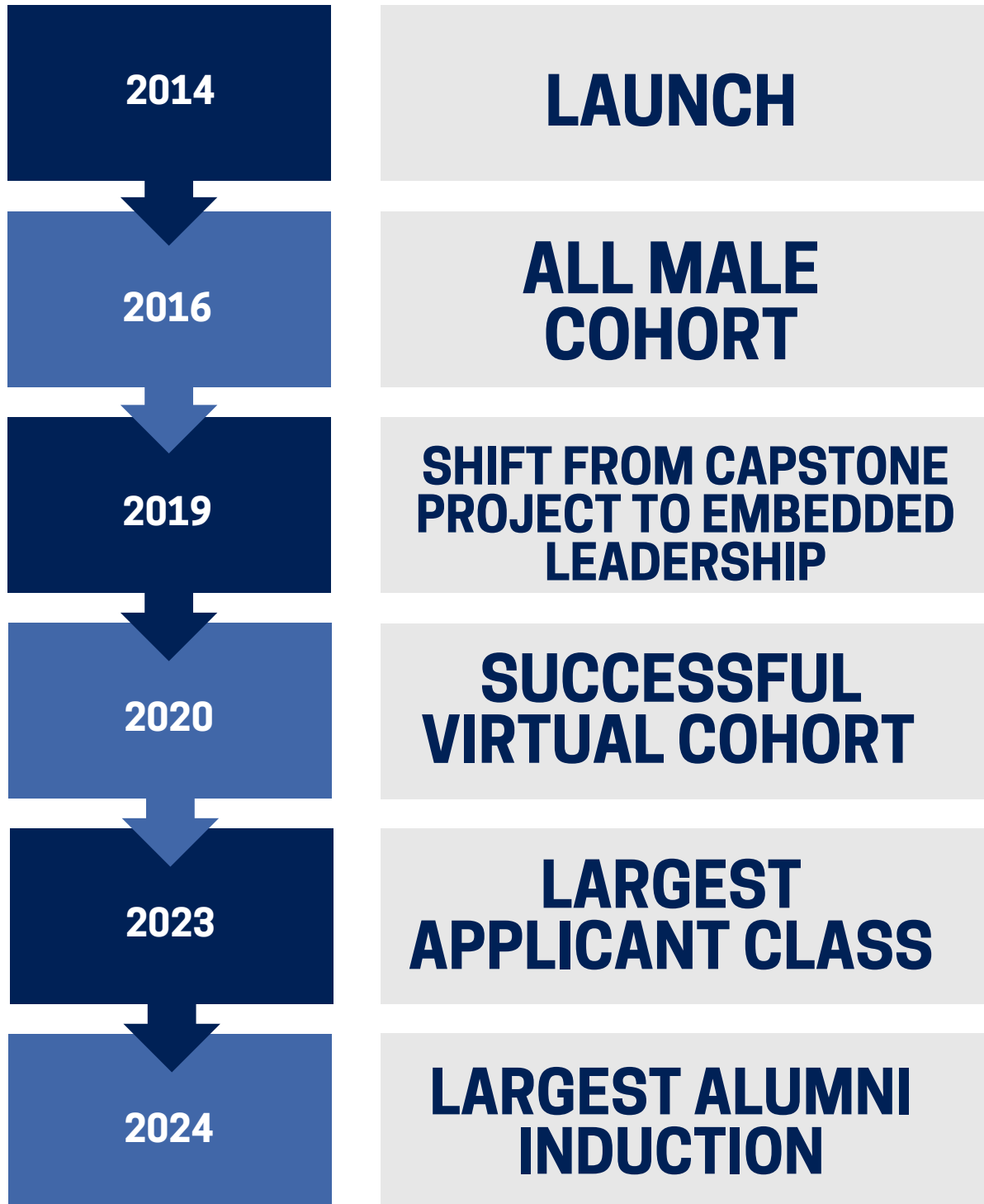


Both ULDI alumni and program managers agree ULDI's unique nature stems from the combination of the curriculum and experience. The foundation of the curriculum remains a collection of readings set against a historical, bird's-eye view of Baton Rouge and its persistent challenges in the areas of education, entrepreneurship, criminal justice and others. This historical context is very critical when leading change from a systems level in communities that have been largely disinvested in or marginalized. The curriculum is infused with experiential activities, group work, thought exercises, and planning processes that ultimately encourage alumni to go out and practice this new version of leadership that's necessary to affect the type of change the community needs.

Most alumni complete the program realizing that the value they bring is not necessarily creating new ideas, but making a shift in the current state of "what is." This realization caused ULDI leadership to change from the alumni completing a Capstone project to an embedded leadership experience where members share how they practice adaptive leadership in their current position on a daily basis.



KEY MOMENTS IN **ULDI**



ULDI's **IMPACT**



While some leadership development programs are more focused on an individual's career, ULDI is specifically geared toward leading for change, which is why it requires a different skill set. At the core of the initiative is the fact that ULDI pushes against the notion of "being a leader." Leadership is not a role, a position, or an elective office—it is about what a person does to address issues and mobilize others to tackle really tough challenges. ULDI alumni span many different roles, from traditional leadership positions such as CEOs, directors and pastors, but many are also individuals who simply want to make an impact in their neighborhood and beyond. After a decade, the program is succeeding by creating a critical mass of people moving the needle by practicing a style of leadership that improves inner city communities and helps them thrive.

Another important characteristic of an ULDI alum is understanding the Activist's Challenge, which is the gulf between what people say they value and the effort they put forth to make a change. For example, children are said to be a precious resource, and if that is true, then decisions affecting their future would mirror that. ULDI participants are trained to identify when that's not the case, and they are equipped to ask the tough questions to help others grapple with this reality also.



ALUMNI IN ACTION

When you look across Baton Rouge today, ULDI alumni dot the leadership landscape in Baton Rouge at institutions such as the YWCA, CATS, the Arts Council, Baton Rouge North Economic Development District, MetroMorphosis and many more. Each alumnus's progression into these roles is a testament to his or her skills, talent, and determination. As they progress in their careers, these alums bring some of the leadership qualities learned through ULDI to bear in their jobs to make our community a better place. Here's what some of them have to say about ULDI's affect on their personal growth, leadership skills, and careers.



Johnathan Hill

Cohort 2 | Practice Lead,
Franklin Associates

"ULDI was a transformative experience that provided me with an opportunity to engage with other individuals who work daily to create social change. The program provided me with a different set of tools to utilize, and challenged me to evaluate my work and its effectiveness from an adaptive perspective."



Amber Curry

Cohort 4 | Development Manager,
Student Achievement Partners

ULDI provided me an opportunity to learn more about Baton Rouge's history and connected me to a network of talented individuals who are focused on collaboratively working to make lasting change in this city by tackling tough challenges and advancing successes. Additionally, this experience provided me the opportunity to reflect on the work I have been doing and discover that there are many ways to improve my leadership practice that can make my work more effective."



Theo Richards

Cohort 3 | CEO, Capital
Area Transit System

"ULDI was a great experience that allowed me to develop perspectives on how to tackle social and injustice issues. By learning and understanding the importance of adaptive leadership, I'm able, as a leader, to take people outside of their comfort zones and assess and address the toughest challenges."



Helen Frink

Cohort 5 | Director of Public Affairs,
Planned Parenthood Gulf Coast

"Believing that Baton Rouge needs work and improvement is not a unique or uncommon sentiment among those who are paying attention. The tough part is figuring out HOW to make change happen, and my year with ULDI prepared me to do just that. Not only was I armed with invaluable tools and knowledge for change, but also a group of people working toward the same goals for the city."





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LOOKING AHEAD

As The Urban Leadership Development Initiative continues into the next decade, organizers hope that it is seen as a multi-generation space where leadership is practiced and continues to evolve. The program seeks to train change agents of all ages and stages of their career. While it may be a refresher for some and a strong foundation for others, ULDI will always be a program that responds to the needs and challenges of our community. Here's to the change agents of the future!

MORE ABOUT US

To learn more about The Urban Leadership Development Initiative (ULDI) and how you can get involved, reach us by using our contact information listed below.



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