

THE CULTURAL ARTS COUNCIL OF HOUSTON/HARRIS COUNTY

# HOUSTONartsview



SPRING 2004



#### UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON

##### CREATIVE WRITING PROGRAM

In 1997, *U.S. News and World Report* ranked the Creative Writing Program at the University of Houston as the second best writing program in the country, out of a field of 200. The title was well deserved, as UH offers graduate classes taught by some of the country's most respected writers. Instructors have included novelist and short story writers such as Donald Barthelme, Rosellen Brown, and Mary Gaitskill; essayist Phillip Lopate; and some of the world's most important poets, including Cynthia MacDonald, Edward Hirsch, Philip Levine, Richard Howard, Howard Moss and Adam Zagajewski. Attracted to all this literary star power are some of the country's best students from such impressive undergraduate schools as Harvard, Vassar, and Columbia. And yes, there are even a few homegrown Houstonians in the student pool. After making it through the rigorous admissions standards (only seven percent of those who apply actually get in), the up-and-comings who arrive at the university spend years in time-consuming course work. UH was one of the first to offer a PhD for creative writers—their dissertations are novels and poetry collections. And many students graduate with award-winning books under their belts ready to go out into the world as published writers and well-trained academics. For more information, visit their website at [www.uh.edu/cwp](http://www.uh.edu/cwp).

#### VOICES BREAKING BOUNDARIES

Diversity is a good thing. But for a long time, it seemed like Houston writers weren't hearing each other across cultural boundaries. So, four years ago, five women got together and looked for a way to turn up the volume on the many voices of Houston's rich culture so that we revel in our diversity through the magic of art. Voices Breaking Boundaries, or VBB, as they call themselves, was born to "cross borders, sustain dialogue and incite change." A primary goal includes reaching out to communities that are often overlooked. And VBB has found many ways to touch



VOICES BREAKING BOUNDARIES' artistic leader Sehba Sarwar directs a workshop at Sharpstown High School  
Photo by Paul Hester, courtesy of Voices Breaking Boundaries

the lives of Houstonians living on the edge. Using multi-media and writers workshops offered to at-risk high school students and adult immigrants, VBB gives marginalized Houstonians an opportunity to find their voice. The organization also offers the city a chance to experience other cultures by bringing in writers such as the Indian activist Arundhati Roy. Since 2001, it expanded its offerings beyond the literary arts and now offers dance, music, interdisciplinary and film events about everything from mining in Butte Montana to fishing on the Gaza Strip. The performance and lecture events change monthly, so interested comers are encouraged to check out their web site at [www.voicesbreakingboundaries.org](http://www.voicesbreakingboundaries.org).