

A large group of graduates in academic regalia are posed on a modern staircase. They are wearing various colored stoles and holding diplomas. The background shows a multi-level building with glass railings and stairs. The image has a green tint and a diagonal orange line running from the top left to the bottom left.

# **LEVINE SCHOLARS PROGRAM** **ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024**



“To the Levines and The Leon Levine Foundation, we are so immensely grateful for your generosity in funding this prestigious program which has become a model for several other scholarship programs here at UNC Charlotte and beyond. The program that bears the Levine name has set a high standard and provides a distinctive opportunity that attracts top students to Charlotte for an experience that can’t be found anywhere else.”

- Chancellor Sharon Gaber



## LEVINE SCHOLARS PROGRAM ANNUAL REPORT

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## FROM OUR DIRECTOR



A wise mentor once told me that the first twelve months of a new professional position will involve extraordinary learning and growth. I am grateful, therefore, to have stepped into the role of Faculty Director with many years of prior LSP experience. We have hit the ground running in striking a new balance between honoring the program’s history while embracing opportunities for change with a firm vision for the future. It has been a privilege to work alongside our exceptional scholars, staff and alumni, as well as our strategic partners on these important endeavors.

While we have several new initiatives to share in this report, we have also recommitted to many long-standing LSP traditions. The program provided the Class of 2024 professional development at Senior Retreat and celebrated their achievements at Senior Banquet. A hardy crew of scholars joined me and Dr. Z for Alternative Spring Break with Habitat for Humanity of the Roanoke Valley. Additionally, LSP’s summer study abroad program continued its long-standing collaboration with Stellenbosch University in the Western Cape of South Africa.

The program’s commitment to supporting undergraduate research and professional development has also held fast. Five of the six UNC Charlotte students who traveled to Long Beach, CA to present their research at the annual conference for the National Council on Undergraduate Research were Levine Scholars. Four members of the Levine Scholars Executive Board represented the program at the Undergraduate Scholars Program Administrators Association scholar summit in Columbia, South Carolina. Rising Seniors Sonia Birla and Ellie McCutcheon were two of the university’s three nominees for the prestigious Truman Fellowship, and Kayla Walker and Dhairya Desai, also from the Class of 2025, were named Newman Civic Fellows following in the footsteps of more than a dozen Levine Scholars nominated over the years by the Chancellor for this national honor.

Our alumni community is nearing 200 members, and is more than twice the size of our enrolled scholars. LSP was especially grateful this year for strong alumni support throughout our selection process. Whether volunteering as application reviewers, interviewers, panelists, moderators, reception hosts or discussion facilitators, LSP alumni were critical components in this year’s successful finalist program and recruitment effort.

As I write, Summer 2024 is off to a busy start. In July, we welcomed Dr. Stephanie Norander to our team as LSP’s inaugural Faculty Associate Director focusing on programming and support structures related to leadership, undergraduate research, post-graduate preparedness and professional development. LSP summer abroad travels this year to Sendai, Japan where scholars will explore Disaster Risk, Recovery and Resilience in Tohoku, a region severely impacted by the earthquake and tsunami of 2011. And, of course, we have the Levine Scholars Class of 2028 heading off to Lander, Wyoming to participate in their first LSP summer experience—the NOLS expedition—accompanied by this year’s faculty liaison Dr. Larianne Collins, and the program’s first-ever alumni liaison, Kaitlyn Gosline ’24.

The academic year ahead will be equally exciting. In the context of the upcoming election and broader global challenges, we will be using seminars and whole groups as opportunities to build skill sets around talking through differences and engaging in critical conversations. Plans are in the making for the 10-year reunion for LSP’s first graduating cohort, the launching of an Alumni in Residence initiative and another annual Campus Playhouse Build in partnership with Habitat for Humanity. As always, we end one year and begin another grateful for the exceptional partnership between UNC Charlotte and The Leon Levine Foundation and deeply appreciative for their continued and generous support of the program and its scholars.

With Gratitude,

Heather Smith, Ph.D.  
Faculty Director





## Meet Our New Faculty Associate Director

My name is Stephanie Norander and I am thrilled to begin my role as the new Faculty Associate Director for the Levine Scholars Program. I am excited to build relationships with and serve as a resource for the scholars.

I am especially eager to focus my efforts on enhancing and elevating the pre-professional programming for third-and fourth-year scholars and to expand in-depth research opportunities through the LSP Research Mentoring Initiative.

Prior to accepting the Faculty Associate Director role, I served as Associate Chair and Professor in the Department of Communication Studies, and before that, Executive Director of the Communication Across the Curriculum program in the Office of Undergraduate Education. I earned my Ph.D. in Communication Studies from Ohio University and I have been teaching and mentoring in academia for the past twenty years. My research interests include organizational communication and higher education leadership and curriculum development.

I am looking forward to contributing to the outstanding success of the Levine Scholars Program. My career passion is for guiding students to develop deep, meaningful connections among their interests and life experiences and a sense of purpose in their academic, professional, and civic lives. I am excited to work with the Levine Scholars and stakeholders!

*Stephanie Norander*

Stephanie Norander, Ph.D.  
Faculty Associate Director



*In April, Junior and Senior scholars were invited to the Bissell House for a reception hosted by Chancellor Gaber. Though this event occurs annually, this year scholars and their families were joined by a special guest, UNC System President Peter Hans. This event honored and congratulated our tenth class of Levine Scholar graduates, a momentous occasion for the program.*



# CELEBRATING 10 YEARS

2024 marks 10 years since Levine Scholar graduates first walked across the stage in Halton Arena. Since that time, the program has blossomed as the premier merit scholarship at UNC Charlotte, a true competitor to other prestigious scholarship programs in the region and across the country. A program that began with 15 students and three staff is now 80 students, a staff of nine and over 180 alumni.

The four summer experiences, designed to provide essential growth opportunities for our scholars in leadership, service and professional development, have evolved and grown over the program's first decade. Over 200 scholars have cultivated their leadership skills through the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) on wilderness expeditions in Wyoming and Alaska. LSP has now worked with over 120 nonprofit partners in the program's history, the bonds between the program and the Charlotte community growing closer with each civic engagement project and summer internship cohort. Pre-professional summers, driven by the interests and goals of each individual scholar, have sent Levine Scholars to an ever-growing list of the world's most innovative companies with internships at Apple, Google, Red Hat, St Jude's Children's Hospital and more.

Scholars have also had life changing travel experiences over the past 10 years. From China to Costa Rica, Japan and South Africa, LSP's customized study abroad courses have engaged scholars in

substantial international research and service work. Scholars have also deepened their commitment to global citizenship through short-term LSP-led service trips to the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. LSP Alternative Spring Break trips have immersed students in Habitat for Humanity builds across the southeast United States.

Of course, the program's success has been made possible by the continued generosity of The Leon Levine Foundation. With three renewals of the gift to date and a fourth on the horizon, the enduring partnership between the Foundation and UNC Charlotte continues to flourish. Those directly impacted by the Levine Scholarship articulate its transformational impact. Scholars, their families and program staff know on a personal level how the opportunities and experiences afforded by the program open doors, broaden mindsets, deepen passions and inspire new commitments to service and leadership. More broadly, community partners both in Charlotte and beyond are deeply grateful for the energy and innovative spirit our scholars bring to their service work, internships and civic engagement projects.

Thank you to Dr. Mike Richardson and The Leon Levine Foundation for a decade of overwhelming support; our scholars, alumni and on-campus and community partners with whom they work are so very grateful for your vision and partnership.

## LEVINE SCHOLARS PROGRAM IS ESTABLISHED

**Fall** /Levine Scholars Program announced as a transformational endeavor for UNC Charlotte and the most significant individual academic gift in the University's history

**Spring** /UNC Charlotte honors Sandra and Leon Levine with honorary Doctor of Public Service degrees

## 2009-2010





# GLOBAL IMPACT

Beyond the tremendous impact Levine Scholars have on their local and campus communities, they also have opportunities to explore and engage on a global level. In addition to joining signature UNC Charlotte international programs, the Levine Scholars Program has led several custom-developed education abroad courses, studying a wide range of topics appropriate to the world region, country or host university. To date, LSP has developed courses to investigate health, wellness and socio-spatial justice in Stellenbosch, South Africa (2018, 2023); global cities and globalization in Shanghai, China (2017); and sustainability in Costa Rica (2022). This summer (2024) LSP travels to Sendai, Japan to study Disaster Risk, Recovery and Resilience.



*\* Pins are where one or more scholars have studied, served or interned abroad*

Many scholars forge their own paths as globetrotters. For example, this spring, DJ Cook '25 traveled to Cannes, France to study at the Collège International de Cannes, taking courses in French language, theater and film. The program also afforded DJ an internship in support of the 77th edition of the Cannes Festival. Annabelle Hill '26 also studied in France this spring at Université de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour. She participated in an intensive French program and primarily took language classes. Alongside these courses, she received instruction in linguistics, literature, history, European cinema and French society, all of which were taught in the local lexicon.

While in France at the same time, DJ and Annabelle took advantage of the ease of travel across Europe to embark on a spring break trip of a lifetime, journeying together to four countries in four days and visiting the cities of Venice, Zagreb, Ljubljana and Vienna. Annabelle shared that her biggest takeaway from her travels was the power of people.

My classes in Pau were filled with people from all over the world who were learning and growing just like me which was an awesome start to a lot of friendships that spanned languages and continents. The building of those initial friendships then spanned further into my broader travels as I made friends with shopkeepers in Morocco, hostel dwellers in Slovenia and even a Popeye impersonator in Malta. In essence, while my experience in the world got much wider, the intimidation that a big world may garner nearly disappeared as other unsuspecting new friends helped me discover both the world and myself. Thanks to the people I met over the course of my semester, I am noticeably more confident in myself and in the global neighborhood that is out there to be explored.

- Annabelle Hill '26



## FIRST COHORT OF 15 SCHOLARS ENROLL

**Summer** / Partnership with NOLS begins and the first cohort of scholars take on the Absaroka Range in Wyoming

**2010-2011**



**Summer** / Scholars expedition with NOLS through Alaska's Talkeetna Mountain Range

**2011-2012**

**Spring** / Faculty Fellow Program begins with the appointment of Dr. Ron Sass

// Scholars embark on the first legacy project, bringing Dance Marathon to UNC Charlotte to support families at Levine Children's Hospital and raising \$35,066.25 For the Kids (FTK)

**2012-2013**



**Fall** / Inaugural season of Charlotte Football starts a new tradition of Levine Scholars Tailgates with Dr. Mike

**2013-2014**

**Spring** / Levine Class of 2014 graduates, becoming the first alumni

// The Leon Levine Foundation renews and expands their investment in the Levine Scholars Program, increasing the cohort from 15 to 20 students



**Spring** / Construction begins on Levine Hall as the new home to the Levine Scholars Program and Honors College

**2014-2015**





“I’ll be working at St. Jude Research Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee. I’m part of the pediatric oncology education program where I’ll be doing cancer-related research. My group is a computational biology group that will be looking at AI-predicted protein structures and seeing if we can determine the function of proteins from their predicted structures. Specifically, I’ll be working on a machine learning algorithm to help classify them.”

- Roshna Ragunathan '24

“Alongside Kaitlyn Gosline and Jordane Williams, I co-founded and established the Charlotte Harvest Exchange. We worked with The Bulb Mobile Markets as our nonprofit community partner to bring to campus four free farmers markets over the course of the academic year. Not only did we use the civic engagement funds to purchase and donate supplies for The Bulb to use, but we also purchased a large amount of produce to distribute to community members at no cost. Students, faculty, staff or whoever happened to be walking by were able to get free produce.”

- Galen Miller '24



# RECRUITING TOP TALENT

In the 2023-2024 recruitment cycle, the Levine Scholars Program gained another new class of 20 scholars. The Class of 2028 hails from 10 North Carolina counties and seven states, including two new to the LSP roster: Washington and Arizona.

With a full year now under his belt with the Levine Scholars Program, Zack Newsome, Associate Director of Recruitment, continues to amplify and elevate LSP through a combination of marketing campaigns, regional events, recruitment fairs and high school visits to attract potential scholars from across the state and the country.

“LSP remains dedicated to pursuing and implementing innovative strategies to attract and enroll the nation’s highest-achieving students with a value system centered on service. This year, the program experienced an increase in nominations and completed applications compared to the previous year, and we will continue building our applicant pool on that momentum,” Zack explained.

LSP Alumni continue to play an important role in recruiting new scholar cohorts. During this year’s Finalist Dinner, Casey Aldridge '17 offered the keynote speech and finalists had the chance to hear about how the Levine Scholars Program impacted his life. Casey said “I had my whole life mapped out before me when I was sitting in your place, but I am so thankful that the Levine program gave me the tools, the resources, the safety net, and the people to try, fail, learn and grow.”

2,400+  
NOMINEES

20  
SCHOLARS SELECTED

65%  
IN STATE SCHOLARS

35%  
OUT OF STATE SCHOLARS



Casey delivers the keynote speech at  
Finalist Program 2024



**Fall** / Levine Scholars Program Research Mentoring Initiative (LSPRMI) launches

**Spring** / Alternative Spring Break tradition begins with Habitat build in WV

**Summer** / Customized LSP study abroad courses begin in Shanghai with future courses in South Africa, Costa Rica and beyond

2016-2017



**Spring** / May Service Experience launches in the Dominican Republic

2017-2018

**Spring** / The Leon Levine Foundation renews investment in the Levine Scholars Program

2020-2021



**Spring** / LSP partners with Habitat for Humanity to pilot Campus Playhouse Build

2021-2022



**Spring** / The Leon Levine Foundation provides funding to pilot the Alumni in Residence Initiative

**Summer** / Dr. Stephanie Norander joins the LSP team as Faculty Associate Director

// First Alumni NOLS Liaison joins incoming class on the Wyoming Expedition

2023-2024 | 8



# WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



**Julia Nelson '20**  
Biological Science Technician  
*Las Cruces, New Mexico*

## What have you been up to since graduation?

My current job title is biological science technician, which is a lot of syllables to say that I'm someone who runs around outside in the dirt/snow/streams/mountains to collect data to inform conservation and management projects and contributes to research that grows our collective ecological knowledge. This has translated to living a very minimalistic and transient lifestyle that has taken me to half a dozen states in the Pacific/Intermountain west, with five different government agencies or nonprofits and working with countless species of animals and plants.

**Upon reflecting on your time since graduating from LSP, in what ways do you feel the program has shaped, supported or changed you for the better?** Without LSP, I would not have had the knowledge or resources to find my current career path. The earliest LSP experience of NOLS was monumental in my discovery that I have an aptitude for working and thriving in an outdoor mountain environment. This experience shaped my work in conservation and sustainability. Through LSP, I was also able to experience biological fieldwork for the first time; one summer I studied marmots in the mountains of Colorado, another summer monitoring birds in Yellowstone and last a semester in Namibia researching human-animal conflict mitigation. I was able to co-author a scientific publication as an undergrad from my time in Colorado. As a Levine Scholar, I felt challenged to constantly step out of my comfort zone and to explore questions critically and with intersectionality. The steps I took in LSP prepared me for the leaps I was able to take after graduation.

## Seth Flynn '19

UNC Chapel Hill, Dermatology Residency  
*Durham, NC*

## Upon reflecting on your time since graduating from LSP, in what ways do you feel the program has shaped, supported or changed you for the better?

The mentorship and life experiences provided by LSP have meaningfully shaped my perspective and worldview. The program's emphasis on civic and cultural engagement is a definite strength—from learning about the history of apartheid and the HIV epidemic in South Africa, to being afforded



the opportunity to implement a civic engagement grant at a local Charlotte assisted living community, my time in LSP demonstrated the value of deeply engaging in the communities I find myself in.

## What wisdom would you impart to incoming scholars or prospective students?

Take full advantage of the multifaceted offerings of the program: travel as much as you can, participate in the service opportunities such as Alternative Spring Break, find a research mentor early in your college career and investigate your own research questions and interests and embed yourself in the Charlotte community - the Queen City is a special place.



## Vincent Cahill '17

Restructuring Lawyer, Davis Polk & Wardwell  
*New York, NY*

## What have you been up to since graduation?

My first step after graduation was to head to New York to work as a litigation paralegal for a law firm called Davis Polk & Wardwell. Those two years affirmed my interest in becoming a lawyer, so my next step was to attend law school at the University of Pennsylvania. The best part of this experience was leaning

into Philly's boxing culture and participating in the annual Penn Law v. Wharton MBA Fight Night. After graduating from law school and retiring from the boxing ring, I returned to Davis Polk's New York office, where I now work as a restructuring lawyer.

## Upon reflecting on your time since graduating from LSP, in what ways do you feel the program has shaped, supported or changed you for the better?

I am deeply appreciative that my undergraduate experience was shaped by the Levine Scholars Program's emphasis on civic engagement. Each Scholar furthers that legacy in their own way, and I felt compelled to imbue civic engagement into my extracurricular commitments, summer plans and post-graduate aspirations. Even now, I view my pro bono legal work as a natural extension of my Levine experience and I am grateful that the Program continually impressed the importance of community service.

## This year marks 10 years since the first class of Levine Scholars graduated. What would you like to see in the next 10 years?

I hope that the next 10 years are marked by further investment by alumni scholars back into the Program. As students, we were fortunate to have the support of the Levine family, the program's administrators and staff, friends of the Program and the University. As alums, we have the opportunity to pay it forward by giving back in the ways in which we are able.

## Alumni Initiatives

The Levine Scholars Program alumni network is shaping up to be a powerful source of support and connection for current and past scholars. Since the first program cohort graduated 10 years ago, alumni have created the Levine Alumni Council, served as key volunteers and speakers at the annual Finalist Program, and gathered for regional meet-ups. The recent addition of staff member Misty Morin to focus on alumni engagement is strengthening the opportunities for in-depth alumni connections like never before.

## Alumni in Residence Program

With a generous gift from Dr. Mike, LSP plans to launch an Alumni in Residence program in Fall 2025. The selected member of the alumni community will join us for a week of programming, leading talks, providing mentorship to current scholars and more.

## Alumni Liaison to the National Outdoor Leadership School

Kaitlyn Gosline '24, will blaze a new trail in alumni leadership this summer as the NOLS liaison for LSP. Alongside the incoming scholars, Kaitlyn will put her passion for outdoor education to good work hiking the mountains of Wyoming, sharing her wisdom and mentorship as recent LSP graduate along the way.



## FIRST ANNUAL 10-YEAR REUNION

**Fall** / Members of the first LSP graduating class are invited to return home to Charlotte on **October 4 - October 6, 2024**. Reunion activities will emphasize the three core program components of intellectual curiosity, ethical leadership and community service, as well as much celebratory fun!

**JOIN US!**



Program alumni, Dr. Z and Dr. Smith gather during Finalist Program 2024



# MEET THE LSP TEAM



**Heather Smith, Ph.D.**  
Faculty Director



**Zack Newsome '03**  
Associate Director



**Stephanie Norander, Ph.D.**  
Faculty Associate Director



**Tiffany Wilson**  
Coordinator of Scholar  
Support and Initiatives



**Misty Morin '19**  
Assistant Director of Alumni  
Engagement and Communications



**Tonderai Mushipe '12, '16**  
University Program Associate



**Carlette Smith**  
Business Services Coordinator



"We hope that the Levine Scholars will engage in lives of learning, service and leadership while completing their education at UNC Charlotte and will keep their ties to the region long after their graduation. We understand that this opportunity is the first of its kind for UNC Charlotte, an institution that has become and will continue to be a driving force providing exceptional educational opportunities in our region."

-Leon and Sandra Levine