

## HABITAT FOR HUMANITY

*By MacK Ridge '25*

This past summer, I spent six weeks in a pair of thrifted, baggy, blue jeans. I would wake up at 6:00am everyday and make my coffee, choose a t-shirt out of my Habitat for Humanity collection, then slip on those jeans. Each evening they told a different story, with new rips at the knees, new strokes and colors of paint up and down the thigh, and new tracks of caulk leaving impressions on the shins. Each night I would toss them in my washer and pray they came out a little cleaner by morning, but the knees retained grass stains, and the back pockets let everyone know where I wiped my hands after painting a bedroom door. Those jeans hold a million stories about my internship with Habitat for Humanity.



*MacK and other scholars took part in the Critical Home Repair program. Habitat for Humanity is a longstanding partner of the Levine Scholars Program.*  
*continued*

Looking at my jeans now, I can trace back each stain to a family and home I was able to work on this past summer with the Critical Home Repair program. Critical Home Repair is a bit different from typical Habitat volunteering. Rather than building a home from the foundation up, I was tasked with working in homes of elderly or low-income families who could not afford to move from their deteriorating homes. The cut on the right ankle of my jeans will tell the tale of another construction assistant, Janet, and me using an oscillating tool (I prefer to call it Oscar) to cut out a bathtub from the wall around it for an older woman in North Charlotte. That was the day I learned the ins and outs of plumbing and how to install an entire bathtub unit. It's safe to say there have been no maintenance requests from me since. The thighs of my jeans are streaked with caulk from learning how to install trim after you floor a room. That house, near Camp North End, was owned by another older woman who would welcome me to work every morning and send me off with "I'll see you tomorrow then!" even on Fridays. She would sit on her new porch out front in her wheelchair everyday while we installed flooring or repainted her bedroom. She would people watch, wait for her ride to dialysis, talk on her flip phone, sit in the sun and rest, or strike up a conversation with the first worker she could find. She was never in a rush, soaking in every moment she had on her porch, letting the day wash over her until she could comfortably go inside and watch Judge Judy. Each time I cut a piece of wood in the yard and carried it past her spot, into the house, she would stop me to say hello. Even if it was the 12th time that day that I passed her spot, even if I was struggling to get the

piece up the stairs, she would stop me; just to make sure I felt seen. We had to send an extermination team to her house three times; and instead of getting upset, she simply smiled and thanked us at the end of every day. Every time that she would thank me, I would thank her right back. This was the reality of my internship; I did not have a passion for repairing or an interest in construction, but I do adore human connection.

It was the people I worked with and the conversations I had that really stuck with me during my internship. I recall the Camp North End homeowner, who could not be more different than me. Our lived experiences are lifetimes apart. She celebrated her 80th birthday with us in June while I dreaded the thought of turning 20 after the summer. Her health was declining, while I am in what everyone calls "my prime." Still, there was something about her "hellos" and the moments of peace I witnessed that capture why I look back fondly on my experience with Habitat. My build manager taught me how to calculate flooring in her living room, but she also taught me how to live at a gentle pace and smile in the face of the sun on her front porch. Habitat is what you think it is: hammering, painting, making embarrassing mistakes, going home tired, dirtying a pair of thrifted jeans. Yet, it is the people and the connections that make the experience worth it. Homeowners, Habitat employees, neighbors, and families all taught me more about life than I could ever know about construction, but it was the perfect internship for me.

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# Author EVENT

By Annabelle Hill '26

Each year, the University determines a book to serve as the Freshman Common Reading. The book, decided by a committee made up of UNCC faculty and staff, often serves to bring important social issues to light. Issues that unite the population of the University in a quest for progress, justice, and service to the world. The books are often used in freshman English courses and Honors Seminars to not only aid in fulfilling the objectives of the individualized courses, but also to create a greater dialogue around the concepts presented within the formal academic settings of UNCC. Moreover, each year (with the notable exception of Trevor Noah in 2018) the author of the Common Reading text makes a presentation to the University to discuss their work, writing process, or the context behind it. To this end, each year first and second year students within the Levine Scholars Program read and reflect on the Common Reading book and then have group discussions within the program to formulate thoughts and questions prior to the author talk. Afterwards, freshman scholars attend the author discussion and, the following morning, host the author for a private LSP Q&A session.



Annabelle Hill introduces author Dr. Scott Ellsworth at the annual Common Reading event.

The 2022 Freshman Common Reading was *The Ground Breaking* by Dr. Scott Ellsworth. *The Ground Breaking* serves as a well researched account of the Tulsa Race Massacre and its purposefully shrouded history. Throughout the narrative, Dr. Ellsworth, an author and professor at the University of Michigan who is originally from Tulsa, takes readers through the graphically horrific events of the massacre, the bureaucratic coverup in the aftermath of the events by the government, media, and community, and

the uncovering and hopeful restitution of the events through his search for not only the truth of the Massacre but also the bodies of its victims. The Ground Breaking consists of countless interviews with those present during the massacre from both Tulsa's Black and White communities as well as their descendants. The developments and dead ends encountered while reading The Ground Breaking showcase just how deep racism runs in the structure of American society. America has been designed to suppress Black voices, and events such as the Tulsa Massacre are proof. It is important to remember that Tulsa was not an outlier, it is one of countless examples. Rosewood, Florida; Colfax, Louisiana; Washington, D.C.; Wilmington, North Carolina. All of these American cities have been sites of Race Massacres that were purposely erased.

Upon reading the book, many scholars came to a similar conclusion. While the book was certainly a detailed account of the massacre, at times it was hard to follow, written in a style that caused the story to progress arduously. It was a dense read in which the reader had to be truly intentional in order to find themselves at the end. Furthermore, the massacre was devastating to the Black community in Tulsa, but the author himself was White. Together we questioned how this may have affected the narrative and wondered why the author had perhaps chosen not to introduce a Black co-author or co-researcher. These discussions as a group led many scholars to develop thoughtful questions to discover more about Dr. Ellsworth's process and intention throughout the book.

My first introduction to Dr. Ellsworth was at a dinner prior to his talk. Several scholars were invited to have dinner with Dr. Ellsworth and members of the Common Reading selection committee. While this is far from a food review, I would be amiss to not mention the quality of the meal we enjoyed. Over appetizers, entrees, and desserts in the dimly lit dining room of the Golden Owl Tavern, Dr. Ellsworth asked each of us about our interests, the program (with particular interest in NOLS), and our community service in Charlotte. The book was never a part of the discussion at dinner, but on first impression, Dr. Ellsworth came across as a thoughtful man with great interest in our role as young people within the nation. He was clearly educated, curious, and experienced.

Following dinner, we attended Dr. Ellsworth's talk. Each year a freshman Levine Scholar introduces the Common Reading to the room of a few hundred students, faculty, and staff. I gave a brief introduction of Dr. Ellsworth and then he took the stage. In his talk, he discussed a friend he had in childhood who became a victim of racial violence as a 12 year old. Dr. Ellsworth remarked on his initial hope to write a book on the boy which was later discouraged in favor of a second book about the Tulsa Race Massacre (the first being Death in a Promised Land) which was approaching its 100th anniversary. He ended his talk by expressing his hope that young people today would continue working as he did to search for justice. The talk ended with a brief question and answer session during which the question of his personal demographic was brought up for the first time. In response to the initial question of the story not having a Black author potentially having an impact on its telling, Dr. Ellsworth expressed his beliefs that the Tulsa Race Massacre was not only Black history, but also White history, and that he did the story full justice.

The following morning, the first group of freshman and sophomore Levine Scholars sat down with Dr. Ellsworth to discuss the

reading and his talk. The discussion was interesting and both parties learned from the other. Dr. Ellsworth spoke more about his process as a writer and the true business that lies in the writing of books. He discussed his need to publish the book prior to the 100th anniversary of the Massacre to maximize its reach. He continued his explanation of the idea that authors should not be penalized for writing the stories of those outside of their demographic and countered the idea of a Black co-author for The Ground Breaking with his belief that he did the stories justice, utilizing an analogy of the potential absurdity of a textbook having African American, Native American, Asian American, etc. authors. While the discussion certainly countered the expectations of many, it did lead to critical thinking on the role of identity in storytelling and what it looks like to uplift the voices of oppressed groups.

Having conversations about these events and educating ourselves is a critical first step to addressing the injustice that resides in our nation and world. We must ask hard questions and engage in meaningful dialogue. We must learn from what we have read and what we heard from Dr. Ellsworth and determine what steps we as a student body and we as individuals must take to prevent another Tulsa and to overturn the mindsets and systems that cause these tragedies in the future.



*First-year Levine Scholars pose with Dr. Scott Ellsworth, a lecturer of Afroamerican and African Studies at the University of Michigan and author of The Ground Breaking.*



*Scholars listen intently and ask thoughtful questions during the Q&A session in Levine Hall.*

# A MONTH IN COSTA RICA:

## Food, Friends, and Adventure

By Jordane Williams '22

This past summer, I had the wonderful opportunity of visiting Costa Rica, a country of beautiful landscapes and an enchanting way of life. With a small and close-knit group of 16, I experienced a month of fun, adventure, and learning. Looking back, that month seemed to happen so quickly, but every detail of the trip remains vivid in my head—the food, the laughter, the scenery, the wildlife, and the climate.

From the moment we landed in San José, we were met with great hospitality. Upon arriving, we met our host, Dr. Adrienne Pacheco, who from beginning to end was warm and caring. We then met our designated bus driver, Don Gerardo, and our tour guide, Mario—both funny and lovable characters. Admittedly, settling into a new style and pace of living was initially difficult. Perhaps it was the fact that our accommodation lay beneath a train station and would rattle at every passing of a train. Maybe it was finding out that pedestrians did not have the right of way when crossing busy one-way streets in San José; we were honked one too many times. Still, this period of learning and adaptation was one of the things that made our trip special.

While it took a while to get used to living in the area, it took no time to get used to the food. The plantains, rice, and beans were a familiar sight, but they were cooked with a Costa Rican twist that made for a delectable meal. Much of Costa Rica's cuisine consisted of fresh ingredients such as various fruits and vegetables. Moreover, some of the best coffee that I have ever tasted was tasted in Costa Rica.

Beyond the plates, there was adventure to be had every day. Most of our daily activities required walking through the city, during which we could observe locals doing their daily tasks and discover various buildings and landmarks. When lost, our noses knew the way to a particular bakery that was a key landmark on our way to classes. Within just a few days of walking, we began to discover shorter routes, integrating ourselves into San José's urban geography.

When not exploring, we were in classes at the Universidad Hispanoamericana. One of my favorite things about our classes was that we had a new lecturer almost every day and sometimes multiple per day. As such, we learned about Costa Rica through many different lenses. One of my least favorite things about our classes was the length; three hours can be brutal for an American college student used to an hour and fifteen-minute lectures. While I enjoyed many of the classes, my favorite were our Spanish classes. We were split based on proficiency, and three other peers and I were placed into the intermediate/advanced level. Our professor, Señora Laura, did well to create an intimate and cozy classroom through great conversation and entertaining activities.

Even more fun than Spanish class were our excursions to various parts of the city and the country. Within San José, we visited the Gold Museum (el museo de oro,) where we saw various artifacts, as well as an upbeat neighborhood called Barrio Escalante, where we were introduced to Lolita's Garden (El Jardín de Lolita,) our main location for food. Lolita's Garden quickly became a place near and dear to our hearts and stomachs. With a similar feeling to Charlotte's Optimist Hall, Lolita provided a variety of restaurants and cuisines. My favorite menu item was the short rib tacos—although the classic burger with sweet potato fries was a close second.

Another of our excursions took us to a local farmer's market, where we found produce, books, clothes, crafts, and various other miscellaneous items. Outside of San José, we went to La Fortuna, a volcanic town that is a popular ecotourism spot. That weekend, we visited a hot springs resort where we gracefully fell down steep waterslides and enjoyed scalding but soothing pools of hot water. The day after, we went paddleboarding, and I, not knowing how to swim, was very proud of myself for not sitting out the activity. In fact, I was able to get some Instagram-worthy photos standing up on my paddleboard.

Before we had even landed in Costa Rica, there were two things for which we were all excited: sloths and the beach. After two weeks of anticipation, we visited La Paz Waterfall Gardens, where we encountered splendid waterfalls, butterflies, caged jaguars, and, of course, sloths. Our joy was palpable as we spent perhaps thirty minutes adoring and videoing the sloths. The next of our desires was satisfied on our third weekend, when we traveled to the Manuel Antonio National Park. Leading up to this trip, however, we faced Covid-19 scares and a vicious stomach bug that threatened to ruin our beach plans. Although we had a rough start to the weekend with a few students under the weather, the illness quickly passed. We were able to make it to the beach, where we took fantastic photos and I was able to satisfy my three-week-long yearning for a fresh coconut.

Truly, there was no shortage of new adventures in Costa Rica. This brief article can only scratch the surface of the breadth of my experiences. I made new friends, connected with fellow Levine Scholars, ate well, and gained an opportunity to hone my Spanish-speaking skills. On the plane ride back to the U.S., I began thinking about when next I might return to Costa Rica to continue my adventures. Next time I am back there, I wish to visit the Caribbean coast—the province of Limón, in particular. I am grateful for the opportunity the Levine Scholars Program gave to me to explore and live in such a fascinating country, even if just for a month.



*Jordane shows off the balance and skill needed to paddleboard.*



*Eager and ready to start their adventure!*



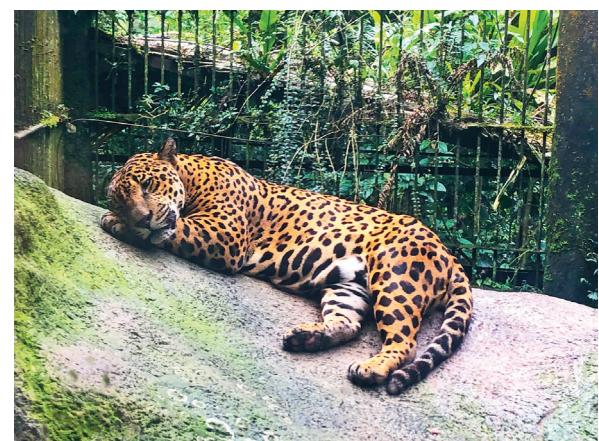
*Levine Scholars had the took classes at Universidad Hispanoamericana, including Spanish classes.*



*Arenal Hanging Bridges offers many tours, like Bird Watching, Mistico Night Walk, and more.*



*Scholars participate in service, even when away from home.*



*Our visit to La Paz Waterfall Gardens did not disappoint!*

# A RESEARCH CONFERENCE: MINUS THE RESEARCH

*By Ellie McCutchen '25*



*Ellie was responsible for many aspects of the conference, including designing the program.*

I never know what to expect when I walk into Dr. Szmer's office. Dr. Szmer is a professor in the Political Science department and since meeting with him to talk about the opportunities at Charlotte, he has become one of my mentors on campus. Dr. Szmer has been a long supporter of the Levine Scholars Program and goes out of his way to meet with any scholar interested in Political Science. He also goes the extra mile to provide insightful advice and connect scholars to enriching opportunities.

After taking his American Politics class in the fall of my first year, I was offered the position of preceptor for the spring semester. As a preceptor, I acted as a teaching assistant and would meet with Dr. Szmer regularly to discuss the class, send announcements, and assist students. During one of our meetings, he mentioned that Dr. Kropf, another professor in the Political Science department, was planning a research conference over the summer and was looking for an assistant. To my surprise, he had recommended me for the position. Not only did I not feel qualified to help plan a research conference, but I was unsure if I could take the position while participating in my non-profit internship in Charlotte. Despite my reservations, I met with Dr. Kropf and learned that she was planning the Election Science, Reform, and Administration (ESRA) Conference to be held at UNC Charlotte. I have always been interested in voting, political campaigns, and election administration so the opportunity to not only help plan the conference but attend was a dream come true. I was also aware of how unique this

opportunity was. Levine Scholars have long participated in research conferences but the ability to experience the inner workings of one was something different. I knew I had to seize this opportunity so I met with Dr. Zablotsky to make sure I could successfully participate in my internship at Opera Carolina, a statistics summer course, and this research conference. With her advice, I jumped right in.

Luckily, I was able to do most of my work from my summer apartment in Martin Hall. After getting back from the opera, I would do my statistics homework, eat dinner, and work on the ESRA Conference. My tasks ranged from updating conference registration to attending a meeting at the Mecklenburg County Board of Elections. I also attended meetings with Dr. Kropf and various vendors, managed registration, and interacted with researchers from around the world. My favorite innovative idea I had while working on the conference was to provide pronoun stickers to put on name tags. Dr. Kropf and I agreed on the importance of giving attendees the opportunity to specify their pronouns, but asking everyone to send us their preferred pronouns would be logistically difficult. Dr. Kropf was also aware that some attendees may be uncomfortable displaying their pronouns. Using stickers allowed participants to decide for themselves if they wanted to share their pronouns and took the burden off of us to reach out to each participant. However, the thing I am most proud of is the website I created. I had never worked on a website before and the only design experience I had was serving as a yearbook editor in high school. Needless to say,

when Dr. Kropf asked me to create and manage the website, I did not know where to start. Through the training modules and the outside research I did, I was able to put together a website that was functional and aesthetically pleasing. It was used at the conference as an online program with a schedule, program committee biographies, and links to all papers and posters. Through that experience, I was ultimately able to learn a new transferable skill.

The conference took place July 27th-29th at the Marriott on campus with over 120 attendees joining in person and virtually. Since the ESRA Conference was a hybrid conference, we had to be innovative in the ways we utilized Zoom in giant conference rooms. We also wanted to make sure that the conversational and networking aspects of the conference were not lost to those who chose to attend virtually. With the help of the UNC Charlotte Emerging Media Communications Team and a Slack channel, the virtual aspects merged seamlessly with the rest of the conference. Other than a few missing nametags, some intense air conditioning, and the food poisoning I got from eating a salad I left in my car, the conference commenced as planned.

During the conference, I ran around checking on research sessions, made sure lunch was on time, and updated the schedule. Fortunately, I was able to find time to listen to research on poll worker retention, gerrymandering, absentee ballots, and almost anything you can think of related to elections. I was also able to speak with the researchers and professors who provided insight into their fields of expertise as well as their careers. Local election officials, graduate students, and congressional workers also attended the conference. Dr. Kropf's goal was to create a conference that allowed local election officials to directly engage with academics and vice versa. The local election officials were fascinating to listen to especially when they talked about their experiences from the 2020 election. The director of the North Carolina State Board of Elections, Karen Brinson Bell, was there as well. Her roundtable about philanthropy in elections raised some interesting questions and I enjoyed hearing her perspective.

It was easy to get overwhelmed by the sheer number of people at the conference and intimidated by their experience. Nevertheless, I tried my best to get past my own awkwardness and truly make the most out of my experience. I was able to improve my networking

skills and got to know some valuable contacts. Juan Cuartas from the Mecklenburg County Board of Elections is a Charlotte Alumni and helped out with the conference. We talked extensively about his time at Charlotte, how he ended up working in elections, and the work he does now. I also befriended the election officials from Buncombe County. I'm grateful that they welcomed me into their group and were honest about the trials that come with administering elections.

I truly enjoyed working on the ESRA Conference this past summer. Dr. Kropf was a joy to work with and learn from. She gifted me with valuable experiences, new connections, and an election nerd t-shirt that has become a staple in my wardrobe. As I have begun researching the Supreme Court with Dr. Szmer this semester, I feel prepared to take on the side of researcher thanks to my time working on the ESRA Conference. As I have begun researching the Supreme Court with Dr. Szmer this semester, I feel prepared to participate in conferences once again, but as a researcher and presenter this time.



*The "Election Nerd" t-shirt Ellie is wearing was a gift from her mentor, Dr. Kropf.*



# NOLS: AN INSIGHTFUL EXPERIENCE

By Jaiden Ramseur '26

*Hiking through Wyoming often involves treacherous terrain, including snow and hail covered ground.*

NOLS was truly a unique experience. I never imagined spending my summer before college out in the woods. Much less, I never imagined spending the time, almost a full month, with perfect strangers hiking and backpacking day after day. I was terrified of the unknown. However, the unknown was what brought us together; everyone was experiencing similar feelings. I was reassured. Everything was going to be fine. Being out in Wyoming in the Wind River Range was incredible. I'd never been to a place so beautiful and tranquil in nature. The new landscapes at each campsite kept me going. I had a goal in mind, and was rewarded when I made it to a new campsite each day with the wonder and purity of nature. Another meaningful aspect was the people, and I will cherish the bonds I made in NOLS forever. What we were able to accomplish and endure was quite remarkable. We trekked up mountains, endured through nine mile hikes, slept on the ridges of mountains, and were victim to many hail storms including one that struck our hike back down mount Geike. I look back on these moments and feel proud of myself and our NOLS group, and will continue to look back on these achievements and what we accomplished in the wilderness.

Our first day was very surreal. I did my best trying to convince myself that the first day wasn't going to be hard. I was hopeful that my one-day hike at the local trails back home would be sufficient training. Nope, I was wrong, we hit the ball running. With a 50-pound backpack tugging my shoulders, we trekked upward on a dusty path. Once we reached our first destination, we learned the ropes, such as how to set up camp, how to clean our water with a water treatment solution, and most importantly, how to use the bathroom. That

night we split into our cooking groups and learned how to make cheesy pasta. I never ate so much in my life. Eden was our cook that night, and she forced us to eat every last bite.

As the days progressed, our routine became constant. It was a simple formula. We woke up, ate breakfast and helped clean, packed, hiked, unpacked, ate dinner, and after setting up the tents we finally slept. Even though the routine was the same, each day brought its own experiences and held its own value. Each day was unique. With lessons from our instructors we learned something each week. Some classes were fun and exciting because of their hands-on nature. These included fly fishing and a simulation of real life medical emergencies in which we were tasked to respond to a situation of one of our peers being injured. We were taught how to read a map and use the GPS if we ever got lost. We also learned of varying leadership styles and how we could implement them as designated leaders.

The most interesting aspect was the intricate history of the land we were hiking on. Its history is tragic. Home to the Shoshone and Arapaho Native American tribes, each was forced to live together on limited reservation lands. These two tribes have rather distinct cultures, yet were made to share the same lands with limited space. The history showcased the value of land: how it's cultivated and how it provides the basic necessities for life. This lesson tied into core values of the NOLS program. Because we recognize the worth and beauty of the land we seek to preserve it. Having a light impact is crucial. This was emphasized through their leave no trace principles.



*Left to right: Scholars enjoy their brief time atop Mount Geikie before being caught in a storm on their descent. Cooking with limited ingredients encourages scholars to try new things and be resourceful. Building skills like, navigating maps, is an integral part of NOLS.*

Another essential element of the trip was cooking. For some, it provided a new and fun experience. Challenging and sometimes cumbersome, cooking allowed us to create something ourselves, be creative, and ensure everyone was properly fueled. I would consider Shashank and Gracie to be our 5-star chefs. Shashank experimented with new recipes and plants. For instance, Shashank made a wonderful bluebell pesto alfredo by using rocks to grind up flowers into a pesto consistency. The food was sometimes delicious and sometimes not great. It was a challenge each day to make best use of the ingredients we had. We focused on creating something rather than focusing on what we lacked. Two of our best meals were probably fish tacos, and most importantly, our three-course lasagna. Gracie, Shashank, and Allie made the best three-course lasagna we had ever tasted. The flavors were so mouth-watering. We'd gotten so creative with food to a point that we were making flavored snowballs with water-flavoring packets and fried chicken with Starkist packs.

Another great aspect were the views. Sometimes, you would be sleeping in a field with mountains in the back, and sometimes you would just sleep on the ridge of a mountain. I don't believe I've been in a more beautiful place in my entire life. The sights at times were unbelievable, and you would often hear others, including myself, say, "This isn't real." Having the chance to view nature up close was truly worth it. I would say waking up every morning to the sight of a mountain, going to bed with the sunset, and staying up to view the dotted night sky of fluttering stars were some of the best highlights.

Though we had great highlights, we also had some enduring challenges. One of the hardest days was when Arielle and I were designated leaders. We felt completely unprepared, as our instructors told us we would be leading a 9-mile hike the day after a new ration period. This meant that everyone's backpack was full to the brim and that it was going to be a tiring day. Arielle and I came together to plan the night before. Of course, I was very nervous, and I could tell Arielle was too. We'd never done anything like this before. However, as soon as we got together and shared our ideas we marveled at each other's confidence. We supported each other and ensured each other it was going to be a great day. Though we were all exhausted and tired after an 8-hour day of hiking, we soon realized that we could get through anything.

Another enduring time was the storm of Mount Geikie. Mount Geikie was our first peak ascent. We all woke up already off to a bad start because we started late. To put it in context, for a peak ascent,

instead of hiking for a day, you hike up a mountain. A good rule of thumb is that you get to the summit before noon to avoid bad weather. However, throughout the day we made several stops. Once we got to the top, we stayed there for a good hour. Abby, whose major is meteorology, would often predict the weather for us. However, everyone could tell what the forecast was going to be that afternoon. In some of our photos, you can clearly see the impending danger. Once we decided to head back down, you could see the sky turning darker, with slight rumbles of thunder, warning us to get down immediately. The storm started slowly with tiny drops of rain. However, within minutes, the rain got harder, and the thunder louder. Then came the addition of hail and lighting. I will never forget Gracie politely yelling a comment toward Mount Geikie once we got down. Thankfully we made it back to our campsite. Though our clothes were soaking wet, and we had nothing to eat but our snacks, we were still able to make the most of it. I often look back at this moment and laugh at how crazy we went.

NOLS did something remarkable. I was impressed with the amount of confidence that grew within all of us. We all came out of the woods stronger on the other side. Now that I'm in college, whenever I'm about to interview or prepare for a project, I often hear a voice say, "If you can do NOLS you can do anything." NOLS gave me the ability to get outside of my comfort zone—something I wish I had more experience with when I was in high school. It's the perfect balance of challenge and fun, which I think is an incredible precursor to the college experience. If I'm being honest, you will probably never see me in Wyoming doing a 25-day expedition again. However, our NOLS experience made us stand out, and you realize that you have so much more potential as an individual and collaborator. Evaluating who I was becoming, what I wanted to work on from the new experiences I had, and who I experienced it with was insightful. On our last hiking day, we all had a moment to hike by ourselves. For me, that was the moment I realized a chapter had closed in my life and that a new one had started.



*Incredible views, like this picturesque sunset, are common on the trail.*

# WE MESSED WITH TEXAS: THE LSP AT THE 2022 USPAA SCHOLAR'S SUMMIT

By Galen Miller '23



Galen Miller, Patrick Deegan, and Karsyn Koon represented Charlotte well at the University of Texas at San Antonio.

The Alamo was much smaller than I expected; which, to their everlasting credit, the staff of the Levine Scholars Program (LSP) had warned me about. Cautions about the true scale of historic buildings were only part of the preparations for the Undergraduate Scholars Program Administrators Association (USPAA) Scholars Summit in San Antonio, Texas. Traditionally, the LSP sends a group of junior scholars to attend this weekend event at a university that has a USPAA scholarship program. This year, Karsyn Koon, Patrick Deegan, and I traveled to the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), home of the Terry and Top Scholars Programs. It generally involves panels, discussions, dinners, and other events designed to create opportunities for brainstorming and networking between students and programs. In order to prepare, we had to be well-versed in the structure and intricacies of the LSP, including our selection process for new scholars. We were also briefed in preparation for the all-important swag swap. This event is where students place items from their program or university on a long table and sit on the edge of their seats, waiting for their name tag to be drawn from a hat (or in this case, a plastic basket) so they can rush up and select an item. Our plane tickets purchased, hotel rooms reserved, and LSP swag

in-hand, we headed to the airport in the (very) early morning of Friday, September 30th. We barely made it through the impending hurricane, and learned when we arrived that students from UNC Chapel Hill and ECU traveling to the summit had been trapped in North Carolina by the severe weather.

Previously, my only experiences in Texas involved a lot of driving through some very empty sections in the northern part of the state, and San Antonio shocked me out of my "Texas is one giant, empty prairie" prejudices. The first thing we did after checking into the hotel was take a walk downtown, following the gorgeous example of pedestrian-friendly urban planning that is the San Antonio RiverWalk. The RiverWalk follows a stretch of the San Antonio River for 15 miles, including a 5-mile stretch in the heart of downtown. It's one level below the regular streets: shops, bars, and restaurants run along walkways on either side of an urban waterway lined with massive evergreens. Considered one of the most beautiful sites in Texas, and as the largest urban ecosystem in the United States (both according to the City of San Antonio), the RiverWalk was often the centerpiece of our summit activities—and enjoying it was one of my favorite parts of the experience. Our

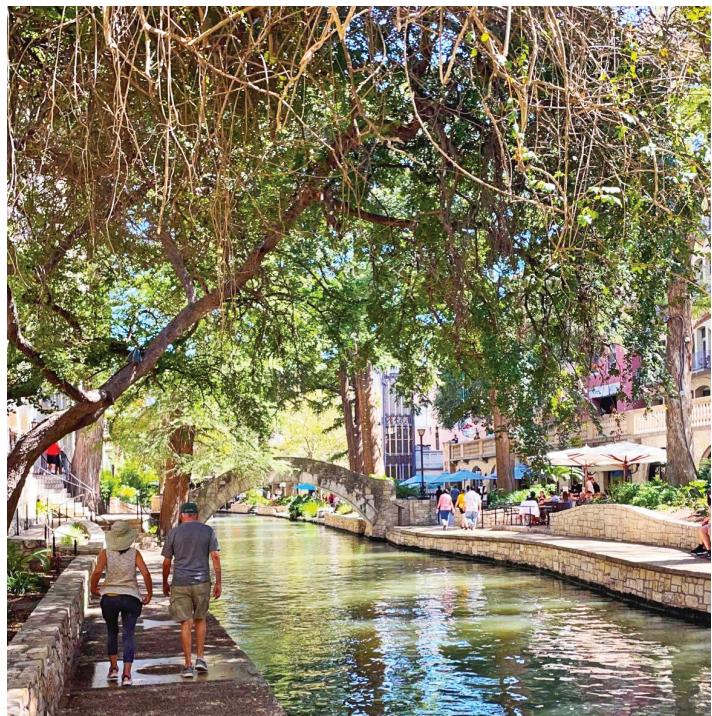
afternoon walk culminated in a visit to the Alamo, where I was duly reminded of Dr. Smith's warning that it would be physically underwhelming. Although it wasn't a very imposing structure, it didn't detract us from taking in the history and significance of the site.

Our first evening, we enjoyed dinner in UTSA's beautiful downtown campus conference center, were introduced to USPAA and UTSA Honors College staff, and listened to a presentation on the power of personal branding. Following the positive tone set by the opening dinner, we were able to attend a wide range of panels given by students from other scholar programs the next day that focused on peer mentoring, scholar development, positive mental health strategies, storytelling and building personal narrative, sexual violence prevention, community engagement, and more.

Between the panels, we had plenty of time to meet and network with scholars from around the country (with a special shoutout to our new friends from the University of Nebraska at Omaha). We enjoyed lunches and evening socials with our peers, trading ideas and stories from our programs and universities. Some common themes emerged: difficulties with keeping scholars engaged all four years, boosting connections between older and younger scholars through effective mentoring, and an array of other challenges. But the good thing about common struggles is that there are common solutions. We hope that the notes and ideas we gathered during the summit, both during the formal panels and through our discussions with other scholars, will serve the LSP well. Similarly, sharing the projects and ideas of the LSP with other programs was an invaluable experience. However, the weekend wasn't all about trading tips and tricks for effective scholarship... it was also about the trading of swag. I managed to board the flight home with a deeper understanding of LSP's place in a broader national context, but also with a beanie, a water bottle, a t-shirt, and a hoodie branded with logos from our host university and colleges of the other attendees. In exchange, LSP ideas accompanied LSP blankets and journals, which can now be found all over the United States from Michigan to Texas.

These summits are a phenomenal way to make friends from around the country, learn the ins and outs of your own scholars program, and collect free college merch that you couldn't possibly have acquired any other way. Just as I recommend the San Antonio RiverWalk to anyone who happens to find themselves in Texas, I recommend that future Levine Scholars jump at the opportunity to attend a USPAA event.

*Scholars had the opportunity to explore University of Texas at San Antonio in-between panel sessions.*





# FULBRIGHT TAIWAN: *Establishing Roots*

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By Annie Sung '22

*Annie Sung 22' embarked on the adventure of a lifetime upon the start of her Fulbright grant experience to Taipei, Taiwan.*

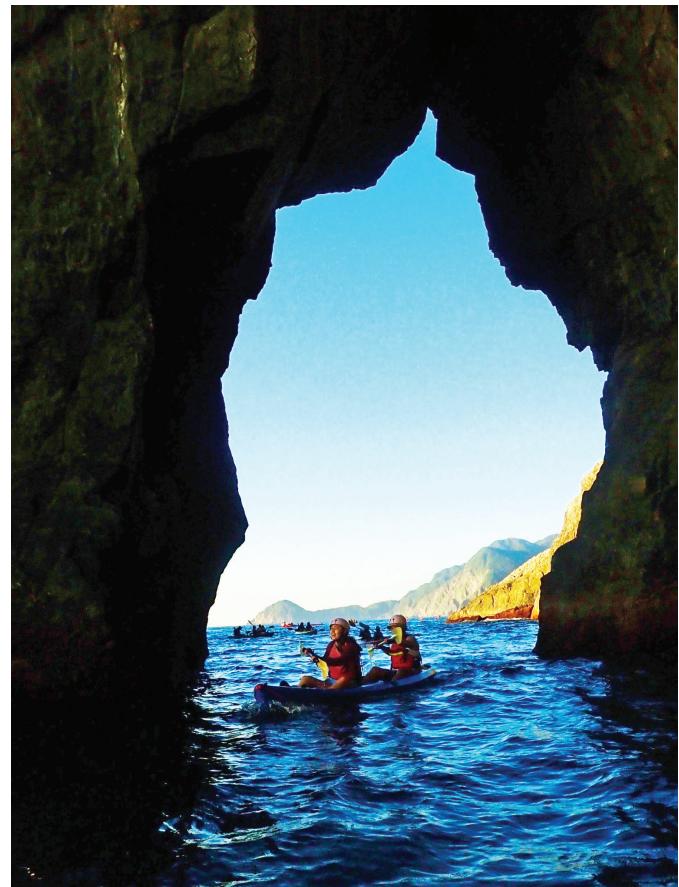
**C**reating my life here in Taiwan has been such an incredible privilege these past few months. Three months has felt like it has passed in the blink of an eye; yet, concurrently, I feel that my experiences are far too abundant to fit into such a short timeframe. My journey began with a 15 hour flight to Taipei followed by a 2 hour taxi ride to a quarantine hotel where I remained confined inside my hotel room for 7 days. The one window in my room, the meals delivered to my door, and the frequent FaceTime calls were about the only things that kept me from going completely stir crazy. By the first night I was allowed to leave the hotel, I just about leapt into the elevator and headed to meet some of the other Fulbright scholars in my cohort for two of the most popular dishes in Taiwan: beef noodle soup and mango ice.

Since that first week, life has been a bustling whirlwind of attending workshops, traveling around the island, meeting new people, and working at my full time job as a Foreign English Teacher. From 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM every weekday, I am at SanHe Elementary School teaching English to 1st, 2nd, and 3rd graders. Being at SanHe has pushed me to challenge my mind's tendency to strictly remain on one straight path. I am forced to remain flexible as I navigate language pedagogy with 15 different classes of 30 students who speak fairly little English. My students' English speaking levels vary widely, but generally, they are still learning preliminary English. It has been a challenging and fun experience incorporating some Mandarin into our classes to assist student's comprehension of English concepts in their native language.

In addition to navigating teaching, I have created a variety of lesson plans that are adjusted to improve students' understanding on certain topics. I have had so much fun developing creative lesson plans for my students and finding new ways to keep them engaged and excited to be in class. This past week, I made waffles with my second grade classes and we talked about different types of spices and flavors from around the world. I have also recently begun an English Club at my school, where a small group of students learn about topics that interest them and where I can teach them English in a more casual and personal setting. I teach over 400 students at my school, so I appreciate the opportunity to deepen my relationships with these students beyond the few hours a week that I teach them.

Outside of school hours, I have struggled (joyfully, most of the time) to practice my Mandarin Chinese through interactions with my local community. Every week, I walk down the street to the corner fruit shop and then continue down the road to get my vegetables from a stand run by a sweet Taiwanese couple. I always make a point to have a conversation with them and just last week, the couple told me that I have been added to their list of "regulars," which brought a smile to my face. Exploring new foods has been one of my favorite ways to engage in the culture here as well. So many people in restaurants or at street night markets are so excited to strike up a conversation and ask me about my life and my experiences thus far in Taiwan. I've also recently begun going to language exchanges at a local coffee shop, where people from many different countries come to strike up conversations and practice their speaking. It's been such an enriching experience to use the language I have learned in a predominantly theoretical sense and actually put it to use on a daily basis to navigate through a day. Outside

*During her time abroad, Annie has had opportunities to travel within her host country, including going sea cave kayaking in Yilan.*



*English Teaching Assistants develop lesson plans for their classes based on age and level of language proficiency. Here, Annie teaches her students about traveling and famous landmarks around the world.*

of spending time at school and exploring new restaurants, I have been able to travel around the country as well. A few weeks ago, I went to a northern coastal town called Yilan. There, a group of Fulbrighters and the Taiwanese friends we've made since arriving in the country camped, had a traditional barbecue on the beach, and went sea cave kayaking. I have hiked a few mountains including Hehuan Mountain, Elephant Mountain, and a few others in my city as well. I have also traveled to a few of the major counties in Taiwan, where I have been able to see just how diverse the culture is from city to city.

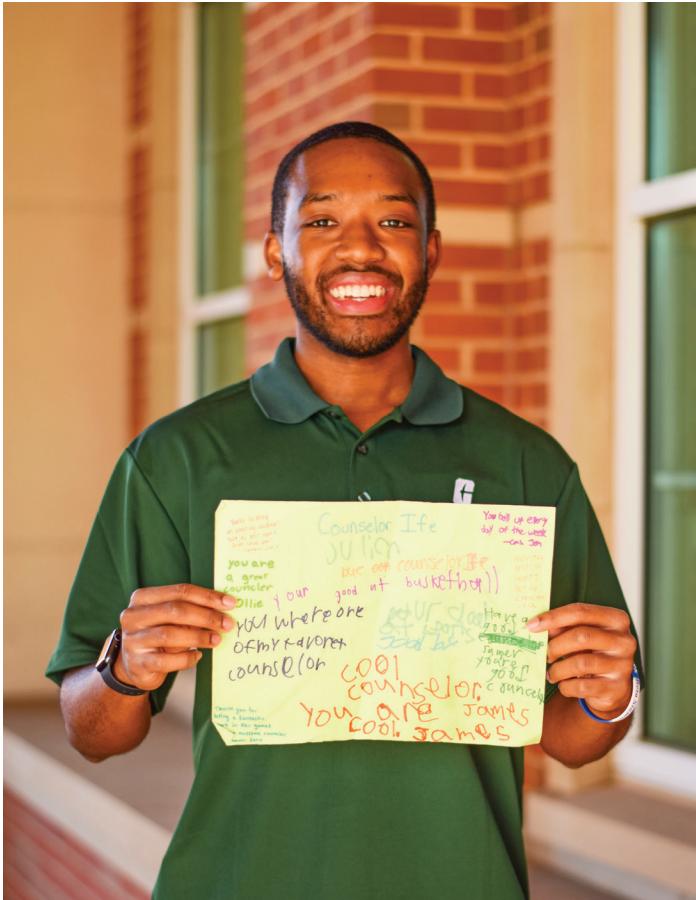
Deciding to move to Taiwan was a decision that I felt confident I should make, but still remained one that I had a lot of concerns and hesitations about. I felt a lot of pressure from myself to not “waste a year” with something that wasn’t going to help progress me in my career. Now, currently living through this decision, I would recommend that everyone consider the option of taking time after school to travel to a new place and experience something completely different. While it is not the path for everyone, I think that the potential benefits outweigh the concerns. There is nothing quite like immersing yourself in a new environment and challenging your present mindset; exposing yourself to a new set of obstacles and priorities. As I look ahead at the next 9 months that I have left in Taiwan, I am filled with excitement about the connections that I hope to continue to develop, the shared experiences that I will have with the community here, and the memories that I will be able to cherish.



*Traditional dishes that Annie has enjoyed during her Fulbright experience include Taiwanese beef noodle soup and mango ice.*

# CLINICAL RESEARCH MADE FUN: INSIDE CLEVELAND CLINIC'S PEDIATRIC **ADHD** SUMMER TREATMENT PROGRAM

By Ife Onasanya '24



*Ife proudly holds a card made out to him from the children he worked with in the ADHD Evaluation and Treatment Clinic at the Cleveland Clinic.*



This past summer I was given the opportunity to work at Cleveland Clinic; one of the nation's leading research institutes that provides treatment to patients of all ages. While looking for pre-professional internships, I sought out an organization that would provide me the opportunity to gain experience with direct patient contact. As a psychology major, Cleveland Clinic's ADHD Center for Evaluation and Treatment was a perfect fit for both my professional interests and career goals. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is one of the major mental health disorders in children and accounts for more referrals to pediatric services than any other disorder. It is important to utilize effective interventions that can be implemented during childhood to reduce the chances of problems later in adolescence. The administration of psychoactive medication, such as Ritalin, has been the most common form of treatment for several decades. While effective, psychoactive medication only provides short-term solutions rather than improving long-term outcomes. The Summer Treatment Program (STP) at Cleveland Clinic takes an approach that combines an intensive summer day treatment program with an outpatient follow-up program, to provide an effective,

long-term plan. Using a point system, the STP aims to administer treatment that produces changes in behavior that will persist, even after the program has ended, and generalize to other settings.

As a clinical staff member, I implemented individually designed treatment plans under the supervision of Ph.D. and M.D staff members. I was in direct contact with the pediatric patients in my group the entire day, leading group activities while simultaneously collecting behavioral data.

At the conclusion of this program, I analyzed behavioral data, targets, and goals summarizing it in a clinical report to be distributed to schools and parents. Through this experience working as a clinical staff member for the Summer Treatment Program, I extensively developed my research, interpersonal, and leadership skills; bringing me one step closer to my future career goals. I would like to thank both the Levine Scholars Program and Cleveland Clinic for making such an amazing experience possible.

# GET TO KNOW US



**Dr. Diane Zablotsky** is the Faculty Director of the Levine Scholars Program. Dr. Zablotsky earned a Bachelor of Science in Individual and Family Studies from Pennsylvania State University in 1980, a Master of Arts in Social Science from the State University of New York at Binghamton in 1984, and a Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Maryland in 1990. Before joining the faculty at UNC Charlotte in 1992, Dr. Zablotsky worked at the National Institute on Aging (National Institutes of Health) and the Andrus Gerontology Center (University of Southern California.) Dr. Zablotsky has served as board chair of the BRIDGES Academic Leadership for Women in North Carolina and is a past president of the Undergraduate Scholars Program Administrators Association.



**Zack Newsome** is the Associate Director of the Levine Scholars Program. Before joining the Levine Scholars Program, Zack worked in Undergraduate Admissions at Charlotte for over eight years, most recently serving as an Associate Director. He has worked in higher education for over thirteen years at public and private institutions. He also completed his undergraduate degree at UNC Charlotte.



**Misty Morin** is the Assistant Director of Alumni Engagement and Communications of the Levine Scholars Program. A graduate of Charlotte in 2019, she was a Martin Scholar and studied English and Spanish. Misty received a Fulbright grant to teach English in Logroño, La Rioja, Spain.



**Carlette Smith** joined the Levine Scholars Program in 2022 as the Business Services Coordinator. Carlette earned her Bachelor of Business Administration-Management from Brenau University in Gainesville, Georgia in 2005. She spent 18 years in corporate with a manufacturing company, moving with the company to the Charlotte area in 2010.



**Blake Marlowe** is a Graduate Assistant of the Levine Scholars Program and provides support in seminars, civic engagement projects, and undergraduate research. She is currently pursuing her Master's in History at University of North Carolina at Charlotte and hopes to become a professor in the future.



**Dr. Heather Smith** is the Faculty Fellow and incoming Faculty Director of the Levine Scholars Program. As Fellow, she supports civic engagement, undergraduate research, and study abroad. She is also Professor and Interim Chair of the Department of Geography and Earth Sciences. Dr. Smith earned her undergraduate degree at Chapel Hill as a Morehead Scholar and graduate degrees in Canada. Her research explores globalization and its impact on the spaces, places, and people of North American cities. She is the recipient of the 2014 Provost's Faculty Award for Community Engagement and the 2017 Harshini V. De Silva Graduate Mentor Award.



**Tiffany Wilson** joined the Levine Scholars Program in 2022 as the Coordinator of Scholar Support and Initiatives. Previously, Tiffany worked as an academic advisor in the MEES Department at UNC Charlotte. Tiffany earned her Bachelor's degree in Human Development and Family Studies and a Master's degree in Clinical Mental Counseling from Kent State University. Tiffany is currently working on her Ed.D. in Educational Leadership with a concentration in Higher Education.



**Tonderai Mushipe** joined the Levine Scholars Program in 2021 and provides broad-based support in office management, budgeting, student services, and recruitment. Tonderai earned both his Bachelor's degree in Economics and Master's in Public Administration at UNC Charlotte. He is also working on his Ph.D. in Urban Geography from UNC Charlotte. Tonderai has also been heavily involved in peer mentorship and student leadership at UNC Charlotte.



**Jessica Fisher** joined the Levine Scholars Program in 2021 as a graduate assistant and assists with communications, recruitment, and event planning. Jessica is currently working on her Master's in Educational Leadership and plans to work within a university music program as an academic advisor or admissions counselor.



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# The Levine Scholars Program

The Levine Scholars Program is a four-year scholarship that includes full tuition, room, board and four summer experiences, including study abroad, which will develop leadership skills and social awareness. In 2010, the inaugural class of Levine Scholars

enrolled at UNC Charlotte and approximately 20 scholarships are awarded to high school seniors every year. The Levine Scholarship is valued at \$105,000 for in-state students and \$155,000 for out-of-state students over four years.

Levine Scholars are talented high school seniors from across the United States whose accomplishments epitomize the values of philanthropists Sandra and Leon Levine, including a demonstrated commitment to community service, intellectual curiosity and the capacity for ethical leadership. Through community engagement, mentoring relationships with civic and business leaders in Charlotte, and a rigorous academic program, Levine Scholars develop the characteristics necessary to produce positive change in the communities in which they live and work. Scholars are able to turn their community service interest into actions with community service grants of \$8,000 to support their work in the community.

It is this unique connection to Charlotte – its resources, leaders and challenges – that differentiates this program from other scholarships of its kind. The program is specifically designed to expose Levine Scholars to the urban culture of a thriving city and to engage them in service to address needs of the citizens of Charlotte.



Levine Scholars Group Photo Fall 2022. Classes of '23, '24, '25, and '26.