

## PAJAMAS ARE OVERRATED

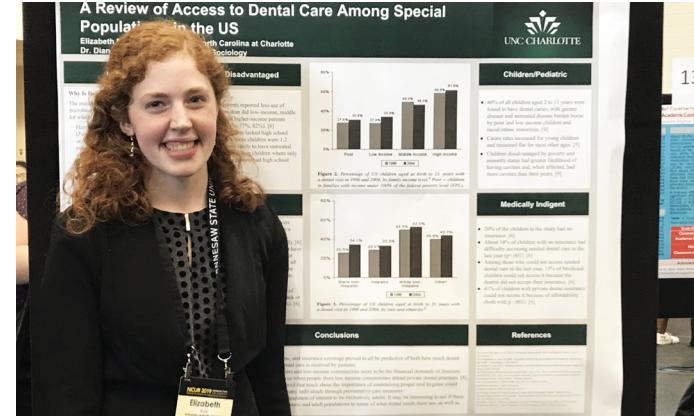
By Elizabeth Kay '20

Saying that I was a low energy kid is probably an understatement. And by “kid”, I mean person age 5-17. Couple my desire to be home in my pajamas all the time with my quiet nature, and you’d probably have a hard time describing me using the terms “scholarship”, “leadership”, and “civic engagement.” However, arriving at UNC Charlotte in the fall of 2016 as a Levine Scholar somehow finally got me out of my pajamas (except on rainy days and weekends, of course).

With my newfound initiative and excitement about the possibilities that college had to offer, I got to work at the end of my second week of school outlining what crazy things I wanted to do during my four years. I was determined to ensure that my level of commitment to making the most of my four years was commensurate to the investment that the Levine Scholars Program had made in my education. Among what would prove to be the most profound on the list were research and developing a dental community outreach program. In the years to follow, this turned into participating in, as well as developing, a wide array of research projects and creating a dental education and care program for homeless women and children called “Brush Up.”

My first research gig was presenting a poster at the UNC Charlotte Undergraduate Research Conference on the effects of global warming on human health. I even had an interactive quiz and candy bowl for those who scored favorably on the quiz. I was pleasantly surprised to find that people were interested in my research, and not so much the candy. That experience led me to embark on my journey through multiple research topics, labs, departments, and local, national, and international research conferences. I assisted PhD students working on their dissertation projects, created community-based research projects, and wrote publishable research articles of my own. Research has led me to so many wonderful faculty mentors, and has helped me to discover an entire part of my career that I now wish to pursue: developing stronger, more affordable dental composite materials. By following this path, I may be able to help a lot more people than I would through clinical work alone.

With the mindset of helping those in the community, I developed and implemented my civic engagement project, called “Brush Up.” Helping people always seems much simpler in theory than it ends up being. However, the long journey to reality was one



*Top: Elizabeth presents research at the National Conference of Undergraduate Research (NCUR) in Atlanta, GA. April 2019.*  
*Bottom: UNC Charlotte students present research at NCUR in Atlanta, GA. April 2019.*

that I wouldn’t trade for anything else. I was able to meet so many inspiring dentists, hygienists, mothers, and children along the way. Seeing the smiles on peoples’ faces as they left my dental care event last April, and discussing dental health with the women and children at the shelter each month, has only furthered my dedication to pursuing dentistry as a career.

It has also made me realize that I can apply my schooling and research in a lot of meaningful ways. I created a dental accessibility assessment research project, where I will be measuring access to dental care in the Charlotte community. I hope to present my findings to the Charlotte Dental Society, and plan on continuing this line of research throughout my career to champion for increased access to dental care.

Maybe all those years that I spent in my pajamas, I was just saving up my energy for these past few years. These years have been some of the most enjoyable, profound, and informative of my life so far. I plan on not putting my pajamas back on for quite some time.

# Jerusalem: We Will Never Break the Chain

By Marika Samuelsson '21



Bottom Right: Marika (second from the right) stops to take a picture with fellow students washing pottery finds at the Mt. Zion dig site. July, 2019.

“EK!!”. It’s 4:00am when an alarm blares you into consciousness. You roll your eyes and glance over at the dirt-soaked clothes that await in the corner. For about 20 seconds you grumble into your pillow, and for about 30 more you ponder what would really happen if you never walked out to the courtyard. Finally, you swing your legs over the bed and slap yourself into reality. After all it was your decision to pay thousands of dollars to be in this exact moment. You brush your teeth and exchange a few glances with your roommate, no one speaks, but your thoughts are the same. You get dressed and weasel your way into the courtyard. Then come the smells; first the sweet aroma of coffee, then dirt coupled with a dank odor that you can’t decipher. They make the call to leave and you begin your journey. As you make your daily commute to the dig site, you can’t help but enjoy the emptiness of the city. The only sounds surrounding you, are the quiet giggles of your friends and the collective patter of work boots. Finally, you make your way through Zion Gate and down the hill to Yousef’s house and the day finally begins.

“Make the chain!” You take your coveted spot and prepare to pass the day’s dig supplies, praising yourself in-between for lifting that one item that everyone thought “was too heavy for you.” You fumble in the dirt for a while when you realize... all your buckets are already full of dirt. It rings out... again “Make the chain!” You pass bucket after bucket of dirt to be dumped. Getting slightly more annoyed each time. You will do this at least seven more times throughout the day. At last the day winds to a close and you prepare for your final chain of the day. You take position and prepare to pass, just when a new volunteer abandons post and leaves you to walk 15 ft to receive the next item (Note: NEVER abandon your position in the chain unless you want to hear unkind words). As you finish your last chain of the day, you leave elated, ready for a hot shower. What you don’t realize is your part in the chain will follow you far beyond the dig site.

When I was first thinking of what to write for this article, I kept thinking of which event would be the most important. I was so unsure of how to perfectly retell times of smiles, tears, laughter, and discomfort. And for whatever reason, the chain popped into my head. The chain is what started and ended our days, and still found a way to play a role in between. Relying on your peers, communicating with them, being honest when you weren’t up to the task, and trusting them were integral parts of success. Something as simple as passing supplies down a line forced us to learn more about our peers and about ourselves. To form a chain was to learn how to carry the load and realizing that no load needed to be carried alone.

Not carrying a load alone defined our time in Jerusalem. From collectively gawking at the splendor of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, navigating each other through the pitch black of Hezekiah’s Tunnel, to crying on each other shoulders during our time at Yad Vashem, we were linked to one another. Celebrating each other’s victories, and being proud of our personal successes. We were each chained together by our time in Jerusalem and chained again by what we had done for one another.

I can’t put into words how much I grew while I was in the Old City. Yet each time, I think of it, I can’t help but be grateful for the people who pushed me to become who I am. So, this is to them. To Dr. McEachnie telling me that it’s okay to speak my mind. To the kind words of Dr. Smith who made every adventure exciting. To the moments with Leila helping with my makeup and me braiding her hair. To the moments with Dr. Z and Kevin constantly playing off each other. I thank you for your encouragement, and I thank you for being a part of my chain.

# FOSTERING AFRICAN AMERICAN LEADERSHIP: THE CHARLOTTE COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE

By Reginald Harper, Jr. '20



*Reginald Jr. '20 (back row, second from the right) enjoys leadership development and giving back with other members of the Charlotte Collegiate Institute.*

Transitioning into college during my freshman year, several questions floated around my head. How will I make friends here? How will those around me challenge me? In what ways will I be able to demonstrate and build upon leadership skills? With all these questions in my mind, I never would have thought that they'd be answered with an email.

Before I even arrived on campus, I received an invitation to an interest meeting for "The Charlotte Collegiate Institute." I had never heard of the organization, but I figured that it was at least worth attending. In retrospect, I am so glad that I made this decision. The Charlotte Collegiate Institute is an organization for African American male college students who display leadership qualities, exhibit academic excellence, and seek opportunities for growth. This program is the younger sister program of the Institute for Responsible Citizenship, both founded by Dr. William Keyes.

The Charlotte Collegiate Institute and the Institute for Responsible Citizenship have the same goal, but the Charlotte Collegiate Institute differs in that it is only open to students in the Charlotte area. Among the schools represented are the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Davidson College, Johnson C. Smith University, Queens University of Charlotte, and Johnson & Wales University. The program has grown branching out to include those

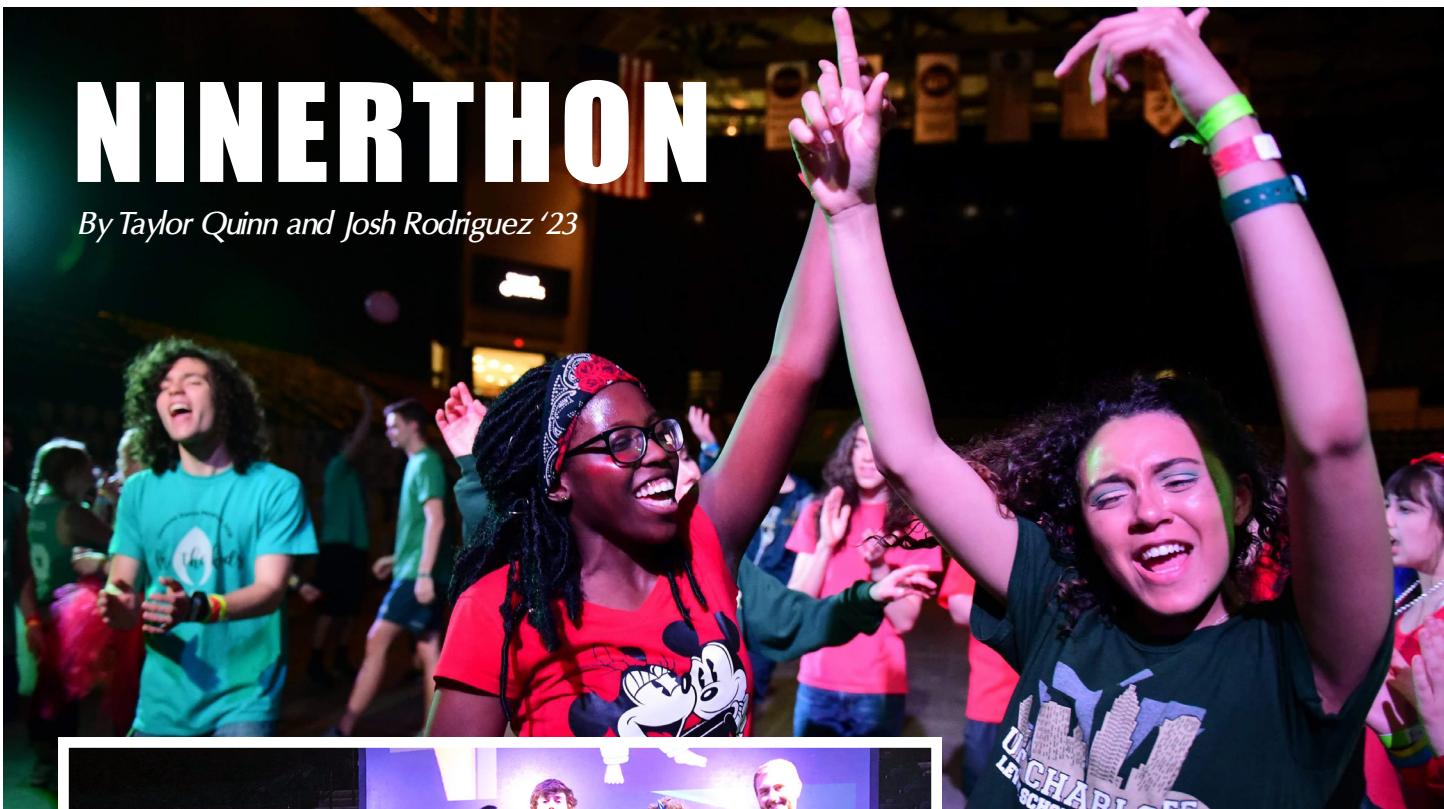
in Greensboro and the Triangle area. I am proud to say that I was in the inaugural class in the pilot location – Charlotte, North Carolina.

My time in this program has been a blessing. I have gotten to know bright peers who I wouldn't have met otherwise, I've met tremendous leaders in our community, and I have learned many skills from local experts. One of the defining moments of the program for me was our first session. Mr. Hugh McColl – the founder of Bank of America and Charlotte as we know it – attended our session. He spoke to us about his story and the defining moments that made him who he is. He encouraged and admonished us to become the leaders we want to be. Moments like these along with rich dialogues and relationship building have filled my past few years with the group.

I am so grateful for Dr. Keyes, Mr. Greg Johnson (the current overseer for the Charlotte region), my peer participants, and the many local leaders who sacrificed their time to visit our sessions. These leaders demonstrated an important facet of leadership: reaching back and developing young leaders. The many skills and practices that I have learned during my time with the Institute have made a tremendous impact on my leadership development, and I could never show the fullness of my gratitude for this program.

# NINERTHON

By Taylor Quinn and Josh Rodriguez '23



Top: Esteban Mendieta '18 (Left) Chiamaka Okonkwo '21 (Center) and Marika Samuelsson '21 (Far Right) dance the night away at Dance Marathon (Ninerthon).  
Bottom: UNC Charlotte students enjoy raising \$46,287.19 for Children's Miracle Network in 2019 and look forward to Ninerthon 2020.

The Levine Scholars Program boasts many successes, but one of the largest was the creation of Charlotte Dance Marathon which has recently evolved into Ninerthon. Ninerthon is a nonprofit organization that hosts a 10-hour marathon of dancing and fun each year. We also facilitate fundraisers throughout the year to raise money and awareness for the Ninerthon Big Event and Children's Miracle Network, a network of children's hospitals across the United States. Ninerthon is the largest philanthropic student-led organization at UNC Charlotte and all proceeds raised from our event benefit Levine Children's Hospital. The proceeds benefit several necessities within the hospital, some of which include physical therapy equipment, cognitive development resources, and new technology. For example, our donations funded the Gravity Treadmill and infrared vein finders in Levine Children's Hospital, both of which are essential to a child's rehabilitation stages.

Members of the Levine Scholars class of 2014 founded Ninerthon in 2013. Over the last five years, Ninerthon has raised an average of \$50,000 per year. Strong involvement and leadership from the Levine Scholars have continued throughout the formation of

the program. It also continues to gather significant support from alumni and other scholars. Last year, over 400 people registered for Ninerthon and raised a total of \$46,287.19! We also partner with several on-campus organizations such as Delta Zeta and Zeta Beta Tau and the UNC Charlotte football and soccer teams to hold tabling events and host our Miracle Families.

Beyond the event and beyond the statistics are the families for whom our organization works. Our Miracle Families are families with children who have been or are being treated at Levine Children's Hospital who want to become an active part of our fundraising efforts. Every year, we team up with several Miracle Families who work with us to create exciting events. The Miracle Families get to participate in football practices with the Charlotte 49ers football team, bowling nights, and family dinners. These families are the core of our program. The strength and tenacity which the children display remind us of the purpose of Ninerthon: to raise money For the Kids (FTK). Ninerthon is an organization dedicated to creating hope for those who deserve it the most. FTK.

# EVOLUTION *of* Internships

By Lauren Tooley '20

**A**s a business student, I always knew that internships would be part of my undergraduate career. I grew up performing with dance organizations so I was really interested to get the "backstage pass" to see how they ran from a business perspective. To cast a wide net, I applied to all the arts administration internships I could find across the country. It is pretty nerve racking applying to competitive internships, but I had to trust my experience to show that I was a quick learner and interested in the industry.

Finally, I heard back from one organization: New York City Ballet. This was the organization I always admired growing up, so I couldn't believe that they wanted me to work in their membership department for the summer. Without hesitation I organized housing and, a month later, moved to New York for the summer.

I was nervous about my first day because of all the glamour and prestige that surrounds New York City Ballet. However, the staff were welcoming and humble. Working in development, I was able to really understand the organizational structure and how each staff member fits into the big picture.

The most memorable part of my experience was understanding how integral New York City is to the organization. Every piece of the organization, from their marketing campaigns each year to their core values they work towards every day, reflected a little bit of New York City in them. As I was exploring the city throughout the summer, I realized how the best parts of the city are a part of the organization, such as the goals of inclusion, a rich history, and the fast-paced environment.

As my internship was wrapping up in New York, I recognized that I loved working for dance organizations. It was challenging work filled with problem solving and collaboration, but I was also immersed in an art that I love. Going to the office each day was exciting and full of new possibilities. I am a marketing major, so I pursued a marketing internship at Charlotte Ballet for the fall semester and began working as a content marketing intern.

I was surprised to see how small the staff was for such an active organization. It is so amazing to see how effective a small staff can be, especially when everyone is passionate and excited about their work. The cubicles at Charlotte Ballet have high



Lauren Tooley '20 enjoys discovering the professional and tourism side of New York City and Charlotte during her summer internships.

walls so they are private, but they lend themselves to collaboration because you can easily walk over to a staff member in any department to ask a question or start a new project. Even Hope Muir and Doug Singleton, the artistic and executive directors, respectively, walk around and work with their doors open. The accessibility at every level really contributes to the success of the organization.

I was always told how important networking is, but I didn't realize the true value until I began approaching my final summer experience. I knew I wanted to do another internship in arts marketing in New York City, but I had no idea where to start looking. My supervisor at Charlotte Ballet pointed me towards Capacity Interactive, a digital marketing consulting firm for arts organizations. Charlotte Ballet is one of their clients and really enjoyed Capacity Interactive's contribution to their marketing strategy. After a nerve-racking round of interviews, they offered me a position as a digital marketing intern for the summer.

The work environment was immediately different, as we were serving the nonprofits where I had worked. Instead of the general stress of overall organizational prosperity, we were more focused on the success of each marketing campaign. What I loved the most about Capacity Interactive was that even though the consultants don't work in the organizations, they all committed every resource possible to each clients' success. This showed the wide community of supporters that nonprofits have, who all come together to lift the organization to new levels.

These three internships taught me valuable lessons that will direct how I move forward in my professional career. Everyone always talks about how important collaboration and community are, but I didn't realize how imperative they were until my internship experiences. In every organization, all the staff members were committed to the organizations' goals and values and did everything in their power to achieve and exceed their goals. I hope to be lucky enough to be one of those people in the future, working hard every day "behind the scenes" for a dance organization that shines on stage.



# HOW MY LEVINE SCHOLAR EXPERIENCE CHANGED MY LIFE

By Will Britt '22

*Will '22 and Executive Director and Founder of ourBRIDGE for KIDS Sil Ganzó take a quick picture before starting afterschool activities with the students.*

A year ago, around this time in my first semester at UNC Charlotte, I started looking for a nonprofit internship for the next summer. I was proud of myself at first, as I took the initiative and started working towards my 'dream' nonprofit internship: interning for the Cam Newton Foundation. I chose this organization because they work with kids in the Charlotte Community (and if I got to meet my favorite football player, that wouldn't be the worst thing ever). However, this internship, and my second choice both did not work out. This left Porsha, the current Coordinator of Scholar Support and Initiatives, and I scrambling to find somewhere I could intern over the summer. This led me to my third choice, ourBRIDGE for KIDS.

ourBRIDGE provides an afterschool program for Refugees, Immigrants, and First-Generation Americans, summer programs, and programs for parents. ourBRIDGE was an organization I

wanted to be involved with, but I didn't get my hopes up because I had already struck out twice. This changed the second I stepped into the ourBRIDGE for KIDS center for my interview with Sil Ganzó, the Executive Director. My game face went on as Sil explained the values of ourBRIDGE. Slowly, the interview turned into a conversation and I knew I had to be a part of Sil's vision. Sil asked me one final question that threw me for a loop: "When can you start?"

The first half of my internship, I was the "right hand man" for Erin Tucker the Program Coordinator. I helped her get the center ready for the kids. Erin taught me so much about how a nonprofit organization works. But, more importantly, I was able to witness firsthand how to be an effective leader and advocate for those at ourBRIDGE. I will never forget the conversation we had about her decision to work for ourBRIDGE. She told me that happiness



*Will pictured with two ourBRIDGE kids as they transitioned from playing soccer to starting homework.*

with multiple hugs, high fives, handshakes, and chants of “MR. WILL, MR. WILL, MR. WILL”.

It is hard to know what others are facing until you see it for yourself. From students being bullied at school to fears of ICE, I quickly began to become more trauma-informed. When I realized the trauma these children face and became aware of the barriers they endure daily, I told myself that I had to be all in for the kids every day. I gave everything that I could give while I was at ourBRIDGE, but the kids and the staff gave me so much more. I learned that care and compassion are basic needs. Sometimes, kids just need someone to talk to who they know really cares about them and what they are saying.

ourBRIDGE honestly gave me a home away from home. I now volunteer at ourBRIDGE as much as I can, and I can say that without a doubt, I am the happiest when I am volunteering at ourBRIDGE. It is by far the best part of my life. The kids at ourBRIDGE inspire me every single day to be a better man and more compassionate person. I will not rest until the barriers these children face are broken down, not only for them but for every kid that faces what they face. These children DESERVE THE WORLD.

ourBRIDGE gives everything they can to these children and their families. My dream is that one day every refugee and immigrant child across the United States can be a part of an ourBRIDGE chapter. They deserve a place to be loved and cared for like the kids at ourBRIDGE in Charlotte. This is a dream that would not have been possible without the people I worked with at ourBRIDGE, the constant support from my family, and the Levine Scholars Program. Before my internship at ourBRIDGE, I would have said that I had a good life, but now I would say I have a full life. I am full of joy, compassion, and a drive to do good.

is found in doing what you love. This advice forever changed my perspective on my future, and Erin continues to be a mentor, and friend to lean on.

Anyone that knows me knows that I have always had a passion for working with children. For the second half of my internship, I worked in the second and third-grade classroom alongside Salma, the current Community Outreach Coordinator. Every day the children ate dinner before any other activities. Then we would move to opening circle time, where the kids have an opportunity to share how their day was- allowing them to feel heard. The rest of the day we would play outside with the kids and help them with their homework. We also taught the children about different cultures represented at ourBRIDGE.

I connected with the kids at ourBRIDGE in no time. During outside time, you could find me either playing soccer or playing tag with the kids in kindergarten and first grade. The kids loved it when I got involved, especially because they were ten times better than me at soccer. I also tried to help as many kids as possible with their homework. I enjoyed tutoring because I got to have one-on-one time with the kids. Helping with homework was also important because many of their parents did not speak English and ourBRIDGE was their only resource.

The kids began to trust me more and some of them even told me that I was their best friend. I probably experienced over one hundred plus high fives a day, and I have many secret handshakes with the kids. Sometimes, it seemed like everyday someone else asked me to come up with a new secret handshake. My relationship with the kids grew so much that the kids welcomed me to the classrooms

# BEING THE PRESIDENT OF A LARGE BUT *OBSCURE CLUB*

By Riley Jones '20

For the last year, I have been the president of a club that has over 120 members, holds multiple annual events, maintains connections with several large companies and is well known by similar programs at neighboring universities. However, almost no one on campus has any idea we exist or knows what we do. This club is the UNC Charlotte Actuarial Science Club.

Being the president of this club, I've learned how to answer one question very well: what is an actuary? Basically, an actuary deals with risk management, typically in large insurance companies. Actuaries run all the numbers and create models to manage the broader risks an insurance company takes on when offering various policies. Every actuary must go through a series of at least seven exams. UNC Charlotte offers ten classes taught towards all seven of the first actuarial exams. It is a little-known fact, but we have one of the best actuarial programs in the Southeast.

The basis of building a strong actuarial program is simply introducing students with strong math and analytical skills to the profession. Each semester we hold an interest meeting and go to every upper-level calculus and statistics class to speak about the actuarial profession. We explain it is currently one of the fastest growing, well-paid professions in the US (if the grueling, decade-long examination process and countless study hours doesn't sell the profession to prospective students right away, this fact usually gets them interested). Once a student is interested, they can join the club and then sign up for the first actuarial science class.

The Actuarial Science Club does many things to support all its members in their pursuit of becoming an actuary. We regularly bring in guest speakers from large insurance companies to speak during the first actuarial science class. These presenters talk about their work and why it is important to begin studying for actuarial exams in college. We also offer to pay the cost of taking actuarial exams for every UNC Charlotte student through the support



Riley Jones '20 engages with actuary professionals at the Actuarial Science Day and Career Fair.

of several companies and the Department of Mathematics and Statistics. The exams are typically between \$200-300 each, so this helps lower the barrier of entry into the process of becoming a credentialed actuary.

The flagship event our club holds each year is the Actuarial Science Day and Career Fair. Five years ago, the Actuarial Science Club started this event to serve as a way for all interested students to learn more about the profession and network with professionals. Preparation for this event includes three months of work arranging guest speakers, event planning and contacting companies for the career fair. The morning of the event, guest speakers talk about the profession and how to become credentialed. In the afternoon, there is a networking lunch and then an actuarial career fair. I have had the privilege of running this event for the past two years. This year the event had over 120 students from UNC Charlotte and six neighboring universities, 35 representatives from 16 companies, and a few national organizations in attendance. We even had a company come from Connecticut! Eventually, we hope this event will be the main actuarial event of the Southeast.

Lastly, the club is involved with professional organizations and in the community. We regularly send four - five club members to national events including meetings held by the Society of Actuaries and the annual conference held by the Casualty Actuaries of the Southeast. This is a way to network with professionals and tell them about the program at UNC Charlotte. In fact, last year, directors from the Casualty Actuaries of the Southeast held their Spring event on-campus. We also volunteer with multiple nonprofits each semester; we have a director of community outreach who organizes service events. We feel that giving back to the community is an essential component of being such a large club.

While I came into college with no idea what actuarial science was, all it took was one interest meeting to draw me in. Now, I will be starting my career as an actuary with Zurich North America following graduation. It was one small effort of outreach that changed my academic and professional careers. Now, all I can hope to do is have the same impact on somebody else.



Members of the UNC Charlotte Actuarial Science Club enjoy networking and exploring professional opportunities during the Actuarial Science Day and Career Fair.

# Make the Time STUDY ABROAD

By Sammy Chouffani El Fassi '21

I decided that organizing a semester abroad is something I wanted to accomplish both for my personal growth and to avoid the regret of missing out on a once in a lifetime opportunity. I wanted to study somewhere with strong academics and cutting-edge technology. I chose Hong Kong for all these reasons, plus the fact that it is a very complex place that is quite autonomous and independent from China as a territory yet still highly imbued with both Chinese and British culture.

After months of planning and careful deliberation about how to organize my schedule, I finally made it to Hong Kong. It was overwhelming. Streets packed with people, super tall buildings, gorgeous skylines, beautiful beaches, vast mountains, all in one place. There is so much to do, so much to see, and even after two months of living here, I'm not even close to having explored the entire territory. The food is incredible. When you go to a restaurant here, they have both chopsticks and forks because Hong Kong is one of the few places that has taken the best of Chinese and British cuisine and combined them into the most delicious and complex dishes I've ever had in my life.

But don't let Hong Kong's rich culture and history mislead you, it is truly a city of the future. The malls here give us a glimpse into the future of the human race. They literally span miles and cater to every single human need. I got a chest X-Ray here and visited the mall to get it done. Food, shopping, medical care, work opportunities, education, and so much more can be provided from the malls. Some people even have their apartments attached to the mall so if they really wanted to they could be born, live, and die under one roof, without ever leaving. If you ever get tired of the particular mall you live your life in and refuse to go outside, there's good news. These malls are so big that they have train stations INSIDE them so you can just take the train to another mall across town.

You may have heard about Hong Kong on the news recently. The city is currently in a state of complete civil unrest. Hong Kong was a British colony for over 150 years and as a consequence it became quite independent and developed an identity separate from its Chinese motherland. Most people from Hong Kong are completely fluent in English, so they are browsing Instagram, binging on Netflix, and "Keeping up with the Kardashians" (all of these things are blocked in mainland China). China has plans to roll back the democracy that Hong Kong enjoys, converting Hong Kong to an entirely communist city. Slowly but surely, the Hong Kong government has been passing bills giving China more control of this land and the consequence has been intense backlash from the people. Millions are taking to the streets and protests and riots have been scattered all over this city for nearly five months.

Most of what I see are the peaceful demonstrations. I often see people marching through the streets with masks and helmets, screaming for the freedom of Hong Kong. However, I also see graffiti, vandalism, and have witnessed one violent riot. While the riots and protests mark a turbulent time in Hong Kong, I am humbled to witness history in the making, and I truly wish for the best outcome for the people of Hong Kong.

All in all, this has been a very positive experience. I have made friendships that will last a lifetime and I have had life experiences that aged me like fine wine. When you go abroad, so many misconceptions you had in the past about people and life completely dissolve. It makes you more mature and well-rounded by opening your eyes to more realities of this world. If studying abroad is within your means, you are making a huge mistake if you neglect this once in a lifetime opportunity.



Sammy Chouffani El Fassi '21 enjoys discovering new people, places, and experiences in Hong Kong during his study abroad. Fall 2019.

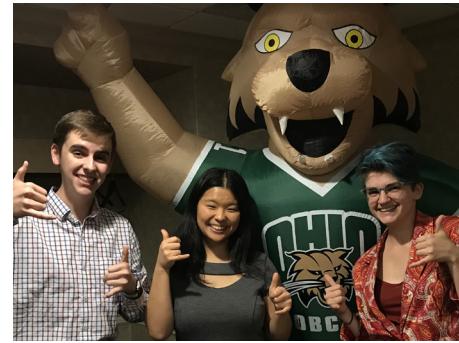
# Scholar Voice, Scholar Impact

By Bridgitt Ku '21

**18** scholar programs. 11 states. This is the annual Undergraduate Scholars Program Administrators Association (USPAA) Scholar Summit, where scholars representing universities from across the country collaborate to brainstorm tactics to improve their respective programs. Over the three-day weekend this past November, scholars shared the features that made their program unique. Scholars also attended sessions with topics that ranged from implementing community initiatives to generating sustainable mental health practices.

At the most recent summit hosted by Ohio University, scholars were invited to sit on a planning committee alongside administrators, an unprecedented move that allowed students to formulate the content presented at the summit. As a member of this committee, I was able to lead sessions on fostering inclusive scholar communities and managing the expectations associated with the title of "scholar". Through the connections I made at the summit, I was able to take a group of freshmen Levine's majoring in computer science to a hackathon at Clemson University. There we spent 24 straight-hours creating innovative tech applications.

This year, 25 institutions will be participating in the Scholar Summit, making it the largest of its kind in USPAA history. It will also be my first year contributing as a facilitator, and I am eagerly anticipating the opportunity to take on this role and connect with even more scholars. By the end of Scholar Summit, I leave with new friendships formed with scholars both in my own program and at other universities (and some new swag). Most of all, I leave with a renewed sense of awe in how truly unique the Levine Scholars Program is and the amount of care Dr. Z and the entire LSP staff dedicate to us scholars.



*Scott Christensen '21 (left), Bridgitt (middle) and Grey Martineau '21 sporting UNC Charlotte pride at the 2019 USPAA Scholar Summit hosted by Ohio University.*

## Sustainability and Mentorship Training: LSP Civic Engagement Lessons

By Kevin Smith '20

**A**s a senior in the Levine Scholars Program (LSP), I've explored multiple avenues of community service. LSP builds strong community partners through service and scholars are encouraged to utilize these relationships to develop civic engagement projects. Through community service, scholars identify areas of a community partner's initiatives that can be improved through the investment of time and resources. In the end, scholars develop leadership skills in conceiving, planning and implementing a project while engaging community partners and Charlotte natives. This is the story of Refurnish 49ers and how it has shaped my undergraduate experience.

Refurnish 49ers is an annual civic engagement project whose goal is to collect dorm furniture and resell it to students at an affordable price. Furniture is collected in May at two locations on campus: South Village and North Village. Habitat for Humanity Restore in University City, Refurnish 49ers's community partner, recycles the furniture. In August, the Restore places the items in the showroom where new students arriving to the UNC Charlotte area can obtain lightly-used furniture at a reasonable price. In 2019, through the service of LSP scholars and UNC Charlotte staff, Refurnish 49ers collected approximately 1,200 cubic feet of dorm furniture.



*Kevin stands in front of the ReStore after completing the annual dorm room furniture collection at UNC Charlotte for Spring 2019.*

At the start of my junior year, I joined the Refurnish 49ers team and learned how to organize an engagement project. Under the leadership of Joseph Obeid (LSP '19), I began attending meetings and assisted the project in multiple capacities. I developed advertising for the 2019 effort. I helped a Habitat representative and a member of UNC Charlotte Recycling's team brainstorm ideas about efficient ways to collect furniture (this was an exciting opportunity to apply my engineering mindset)! I scheduled dates for the event and finalized the advertising campaign across campus in partnership with UNC Charlotte's Housing and Residence Life (HRL) team. Finally, I also had the opportunity to collaborate with the Habitat Restore to coordinate volunteers for the event. Now, as a senior, I have the honor of leading and assisting another student as they carry on this project.

I have the pleasure of looking back on the ways the Refurnish 49ers initiative has impacted my undergraduate experience. My participation in Refurnish 49ers has taught me how to be an

inclusive leader; our meetings often include four different stakeholders and as such, they helped teach me how to be someone who can efficiently engage everyone's needs. Seeing the collaboration between Refurnish 49ers and Habitat for Humanity, I learned how mutual investment can create a thriving community partnership. I am excited to say that I have taken what I learned and now work year-round with the local Restore and other Habitat affiliates (specifically, Alternative Spring Break) to create widespread impact throughout the entire year.

# The Research EXPERIENCE

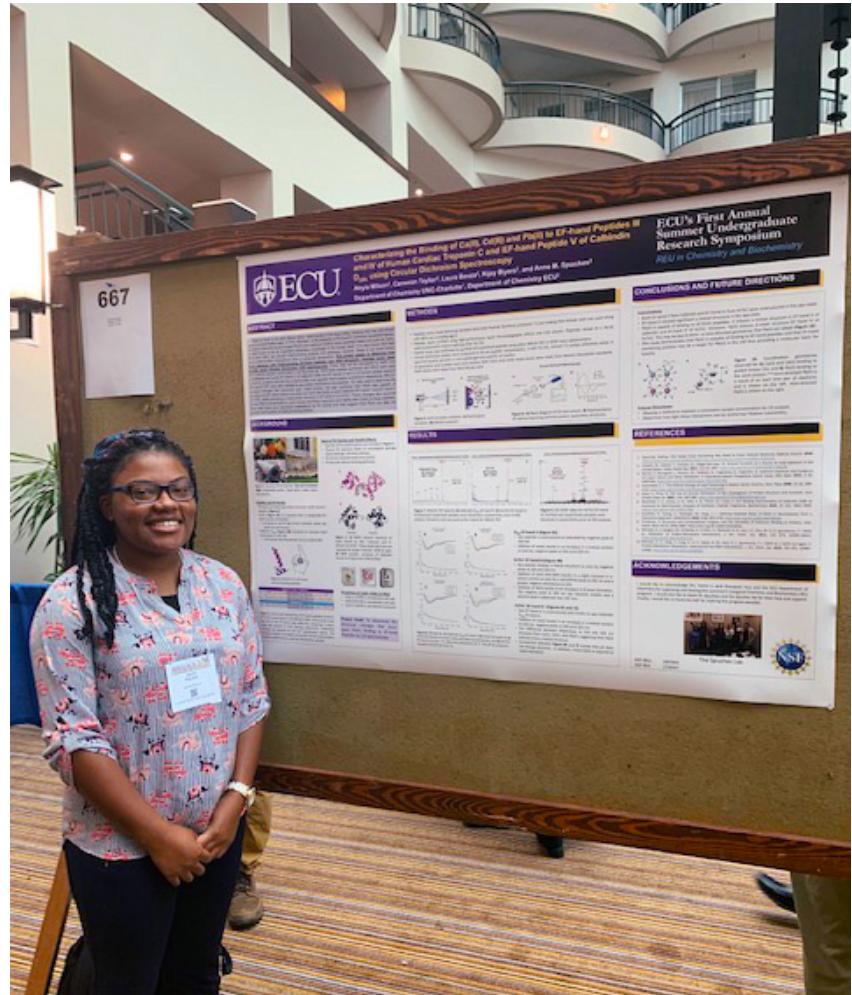
By Akyia Wilson '21

Some of my favorite parts of the Levine scholarship program are the summer experiences. I have been fortunate enough to go on a different experience each summer including the NOLS hiking trip (yes, I survived) and a summer internship with Habitat Charlotte. However, my most transformative experience was the Research for Undergraduates (REU) program hosted by East Carolina University (ECU) this past summer. This program consists of working alongside professors, graduate students, and other peers in a lab of your interest for 10 weeks- and yes, it was paid! While I did enjoy that the program was paid, I pursued the program for many other reasons and I can still honestly say this was a life changing experience for me in a multitude of ways. Before the REU, I had already been involved in research under a professor here at UNC Charlotte for the past year. That particular lab experience was not ideal for me. It left me feeling confused about what I wanted to do. In the period of a year in one lab, I transitioned from being certain of my interest in research to wondering if I would ever do it again. I began to question myself as a student overall. This uncertainty was one of the major deciding factors in applying for the REU program, and lucky for me, it came with great rewards.

I was always taught that without uncomfortable periods or situations, there is no room left for growth. This lesson became an even larger reality for me this past summer. Akyia “the introvert” Wilson went to a different university in a different city, to be with different people doing different work. I was anxious and scared of the uncertainties and “what ifs.”

Two weeks into the program I realized that every difference that I initially could not go without noticing, were now all sources of comfort and appreciation for me. By being able to thrive in this new environment, I was better able to realize some of my own strengths and capabilities. This experience was truly a therapeutic time for me to see myself in a more positive light by doing something that was both personally and generally impactful and rewarding. Not only was this research topic interesting and impactful to me, but the people I was fortunate enough to work with were also nothing short of amazing and helpful.

After completing the REU program, I was able to present research at ECU during an REU symposium and a symposium in Savannah, Georgia. Although nerve wracking, it was still an amazing



Akyia presents research from her REU at an REU symposium in Savannah, Georgia. Summer 2019.

experience for me. This program also made it perfectly clear that I do enjoy research and wish to pursue it in the future in my career. This program has also opened many doors for me. I was able to connect with various professors and students from different universities that participated in this summer program.

I am aware that moments and opportunities such as my experience with REU do not come often. Many people are not aware of the many different REU programs that are available to students, but I am a strong advocate for making yourself aware of any amazing opportunities that the REU program offers. Whether it clarifies any confusion about the future, lets you try research for the first time, continue research, or even just go stay at a different university for a while, an REU program is worth your time.



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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 2019. Classes of '20, '21, '22, and '23.*