



*Left: Lena Ilagan stands in front of the Emperor's summer palace.
Top: Lena beams with excitement as she begins her semester abroad journey at Hongik University. She travels to see Korea's Cho Youngsoo and taste some of her famous homemade Kimchi Mandu (dumplings). Fall 2019*

I stepped out of Exit 2 of Hongik Station to a chaotic scene. It was five-o'clock in the afternoon on a Monday evening and people were desperate to get home. Heavy clouds of smog lay low in the afternoon sun, slowly choking the pedestrians trapped below on the streets. I looked up at the sky and could see no blue, only dust and grey. A quiet lump formed at the back of my throat as I longed for the vast bright blue expanse of Kentucky. I whimpered silently to myself, "What have I done?"

It had not really hit me that I was going to be living across the world for four months until I was on the plane to Korea. I had applied to study abroad at Hongik University in March of that year on a whim. As an Engineering student, I was worried about fitting a semester abroad into my rigid schedule, but after researching, I found the classes I needed to take for my major at Hongik University. But even as I sent in my application, even after I had been accepted as an exchange student to Hongik, even after I had my visa approved, I still had doubts. I wondered whether or not the classes were in

English, I wondered how much Korean I needed to know before I came, I wondered what clothes I should bring so I would look cool. My head was filled with so many worries, and when I stepped out of Hongik Station that afternoon, I was overwhelmed.

To my relief, everything ended up fine. Sort of. While there were many moments abroad, things did not seem fine, I was able to look back at those moments by the end of my experience and see happiness and growth. Some of my worries came true. Some of the classes that I had intended to take were taught completely in Korean and I was forced to scramble and find alternatives. But while the language barrier seemed impenetrable, in the end, many of my professors and peers were willing to work through our differences to give me the best education possible. I not only survived, but thrived in those situations, and I came to realize that those sticky and stressful moments helped give me confidence in my own abilities. Now, I feel like I can go anywhere in the world.

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And while I was busy growing personally, I was able to have lots of fun learning and experiencing life in one of the best cities in the world. At Hongik, I was able to not only take the Engineering classes I needed in order to graduate on time, but I was also able to take classes outside of my discipline in Architecture, Painting, Urban Planning, broadening my experiences and knowledge. The university was also in the heart of one of the liveliest shopping, busking, and arts districts in the city, which lead to many colorful outings with friends. And perhaps most importantly, the food was absolutely incredible. Some of my fondest memories can be found in hot bowls of spicy dumpling soup or in soft, pillowy sweet potato

buns. For every frustrating or scary moment that I had abroad, I can find ten other happy ones where I am enjoying time with my friends, my lips red with the latest sample lip tint and my belly full of kimchi and laughter.

Before I knew it, my time in Korea had ended. I boarded the plane home and thought back to that moment when I had stepped out of Hongik Station on a hazy five o'clock afternoon. I looked back at how much I had grown and learned ever since that moment and at all the fun I had and the friends that I had made. I came into Korea afraid with no idea of what to expect and I flew out fearless and ready to take on whatever challenge came my way. My semester abroad in Seoul empowered me like no other experience and I am forever grateful for the opportunity to study abroad.



From left to right: Lena explores the traditional architecture in Buchon Ro, Korea. She dives in to local cuisine, enjoying Darkgalbi (cheesy chicken). Lena stops at the Dongdaemun Market during a weekend excursion.

DREAMS *Do Come True*

By Crista Cali '22

The day I found out that I was going to be a Levine Scholar, I shouted! I cheered! I called everyone I knew! My parents danced in excitement and cried tears of joy! My dream came true! Not only was I going to UNC Charlotte, my dream school, I was going to be a Levine Scholar and study with some of the brightest, most compassionate thinkers in the world. There was no way anything could be better. At the time, I didn't know that a year later, I would be retracting this statement because there is actually something better than having your dream come true. What could be better? Well, during my nonprofit internship this past summer, I found out-it is, quite simply, being a part of a team that makes someone else's dream come true.

During a Levine Arts and Cultural Event, we were discussing our nonprofit internship plans when I mentioned to one of the hosts that I was looking for an opportunity where I could work with children and possibly do something related to medicine. The host told me about a nonprofit in Charlotte called Dream on 3 (DO3) that she thought might be a good fit. In the weeks that followed, I connected with Elizabeth Lindsey, the co-founder and executive director of DO3, interviewed, and immediately knew that I had to be a part of this amazing nonprofit. The mission of DO3 is "to make dreams come true for children with chronic illnesses, intellectual and developmental disabilities, or life-altering conditions by creating experiences of joy through the world of sports." In essence, the DO3 team plans a personal experience for a Dream Kid recipient (ages 5-21) with their favorite athlete, sporting event, or sports team. The goal is to unite a child's passion for sports to create unforgettable memories and inspire hope that dreams do come true.

At the start of my internship, I learned about the different teams in the organization: logistics, social media, and development. Each team was described to me and the team that stood out to me as the best fit was the logistics team. As part of the logistics team, I researched places to take the children during their dream experience, made itineraries for dream experiences, and asked businesses to donate food or time for the Dream Kid. I loved being able to actually assist in the dream experience process and see it all the way through. I was fortunate to participate in every aspect of a dream experience. I was able to interview a possible Dream Kid, make "asks" for donations, plan fun activities during the dream experience, learn about how a dream is funded and write a grant.



Crista, Dream Kid Michael O'Neil, and Executive Director and Co-Founder Elizabeth Lindsey (right) finish their interview about Michael's dream experience wishes at his home Summer 2019.



*Crista enjoys
Dream on Three's
(DO3) annual Dream
Gala January 2020.*



*Everyone enjoyed the annual Dream Gala
Fundraiser, January 2020.*



*Top: Crista with Dream Kid Anita.
Bottom: Crista with Dream Kid Michael O'Neil.*

Without a doubt, one of my most memorable experiences was meeting Michael, a Dream Kid referral. As part of the DO3 criteria for being accepted as a dream recipient, one of the team members meets with the Dream Kid and family and I was invited to come along. We drove to his house and were able to sit down and talk to Michael. Michael is 20 years old and lives with autism. We asked him questions and were able to get to know him. Through it all, it was heartwarming to hear him speak about his life and how he sees his autism as a gift. His sports dream was to meet and commentate with legendary broadcaster, Al Michaels. After the interview, I got to be the one to tell him that his dream was going to come true. He cried. I cried. His family cried. It was tears of pure joy. Before his dream event, Michael was also invited to the Charlotte Touchdown Club to meet and interview one of his favorite players, former New York Giants' running back, Tiki Barber. I was also able to help plan and attend the meeting. Michael's Dream with Al Michaels came true in the Fall of 2019.

Another memory that will stick with me is being able to attend a Dream experience with Anita, an 18 year old girl who lives with Down's syndrome. She is one of the happiest people I have ever met. Her dream was to meet NASCAR driver, Jimmie Johnson. I took a large role in planning her dream and was able to see it all the way through! I attended her breakfast meeting with Jimmie Johnson and was able to watch a NASCAR race with her from a private condo on the Charlotte Motor Speedway racetrack. Her energy lit up the entire room! I don't think anyone loves NASCAR or Jimmie Johnson as much as Anita!

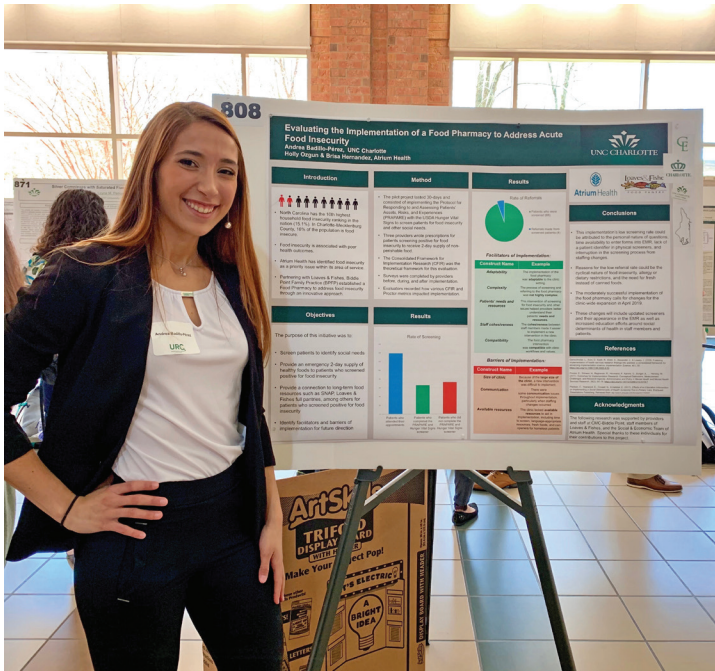
"One Kid. One Dream. One Team." Since interning with this nonprofit, I have internalized DO3's motto and plan to be a lifetime volunteer and supporter. At the end of January 2020, I was invited to help with the Dream Gala in Charlotte which is DO3's largest fundraiser. It was an evening of honoring past Dream Kids joined by celebrity athletes and exclusive guests. The best part of the event for me was reconnecting with the Dream Kids and their families that I had helped plan events for during my nonprofit internship. Being a part of this experience has changed my outlook on life. Although I still set goals for achieving my own dreams, I now realize that there is no better feeling or contribution than working with others to make someone else's dream come true.



*Crista, Dream Kid Anita, her family, and the Jr. Dream team from
her high school all enjoy a day at the Charlotte Motor Speedway
as part of Anita's dream experience.*

LSP MENTORSHIP INITIATIVE

By Andrea Badillo-Pérez '21



Andrea Badillo-Pérez presents research at UNC Charlotte's Undergraduate Research Conference Spring 2019.

Looking back at the last two and a half years that I have experienced as a Levine Scholar overwhelms me. A sea of thoughts and feelings flood my mind as I try to wrap my experience into one coherent statement. I ask myself, what has been the most significant part of this journey that I am living? And as that sea keeps flowing from one aspect of this program to the next, I can say with certainty that there is one that remains still: the people in it.

Coming from San Juan, Puerto Rico, I landed in Charlotte in August 2017 with blind expectations of my college career. I knew I had an academic interest in pursuing a pre-medical track, but that was pretty much it. As an incoming freshman, I thought choosing Biology as my major seemed like the most rational decision. Then, I stumbled upon a General Psychology course I added to my schedule a day before the add/drop deadline. Thanks to that course, I became intrigued in understanding the human mind not only from a physiological perspective, but a social and psychological one as well. So, I added a Psychology major to my undergraduate goals.

By the end of my first semester, I was slowly developing an idea of how I wanted to shape my experiences as a scholar. Even though the combination of Biology and Psychology seemed like a more complete fit for my intellectual curiosities, I still felt like there was a missing piece of the puzzle. But I couldn't find it. That is, until Dr. Smith presented me with the opportunity of being part of a research mentorship initiative.

Through the LSP Research Mentorship Initiative, I was granted the opportunity to work with Atrium Health's Research Coordinator of their Department of Family Medicine, Brisa Hernandez. I helped with the qualitative evaluation of the implementation of a Food Pharmacy Initiative to address food insecurity in Charlotte. With this experience, I learned how in Charlotte-Mecklenburg County,

16% of the population is food insecure with North Carolina ranked 1 out of the 10 hungriest states in the country. This alarming statistic and the established negative correlation between food insecurity and poor health outcomes led to the establishment of a clinical food pharmacy at Biddle Point Family practice to address acute need of food for patients identified as food insecure. This project included the screening of patients to identify social and food-related needs and to provide an emergency 2-day supply of healthy foods, as well as a connection to long-term food resources for patients who screened positive for food insecurity.

One key observation that we were able to conclude from interviews with patients was the need for accessible fresh produce. This qualitative feedback led to the idea of implementing a full-service food pantry located in the neighborhood to meet this need. And in what seemed like the blink of an eye, I was able to put research based findings into civically engaged action and discover how community health would complement my future aspiration of becoming a physician.

Throughout this process I had no idea it would unfold the way it did. I had no idea I would take that General Psychology course my freshman year that would lead me to becoming a double major. Thanks to that experience, I began doing psychology research on how different processes of emotion and cognition can promote healthy behaviors. Now, I have the honor of presenting that research in an international conference in Madrid this Spring 2020. I also had no idea I would find myself doing public health research. Thanks to that experience, I fell in love with the study of community health. I realized that as a future physician, I want to treat my patients in a holistic way that meets their physiological needs while taking into full consideration the psychological and social determinants of health that contribute to their wellness. Now, I have also added a Public Health minor to enter my career aware of such needs. I have presented our food pharmacy work in another research conference, and I have the privilege of forming community partnerships to establish the food pantry as my civic engagement project. Perhaps the most powerful part of it all is that I will pass the project onto younger Levine Scholars who can carry on the legacy while making the project their own.

Never in a million years did I think these pieces of the puzzle would fall together the way they did. Before becoming a Levine Scholar and moving to Charlotte, I could have never imagined the impact that mentors like Dr. Smith and Mrs. Hernandez would have in shaping my undergraduate career. That is why the thought of the people I have met on this journey remains still among the sea of experiences and opportunities the LSP has given me. Simply put, that sea would have never existed without them.

Andrea and a community partner smile excitedly after a meeting as they prepare to open a local food pantry.



from PROSPECTIVE STUDENT to **NINER** GUIDE

By Kira Chiles, Allison File,
Cooper Manley, and Mya Mitchell
Class of 2023

No matter where a student ends up attending college, they almost certainly remember their tour of that school. The first sight of campus, a glimpse into student life, and of course, the tour guide themselves. Personally, I can recall my charismatic and engaging tour guide during the Levine Finalist Program that led my first official tour of UNC Charlotte. Additionally, I remember being underwhelmed by tour experiences at other schools, resulting in a lack of connection with these institutions. The importance of tour guides cannot be overstated, which is why the admissions department here at UNC Charlotte puts substantial effort into the selection, training, and care of their tour guide team. After a full semester of interviews and training, the four of us came out with a new appreciation for the guest experience, and a better understanding of what it means to represent our university through a new channel. We learned a courseload worth of information about our amazing campus, how to keep our energy up and our guests happy, and how to be confident in our love for UNC Charlotte. It wasn't easy, but it was undoubtedly one of the most rewarding experiences of our freshman year. So, bear with us as we share a little about becoming Niner Guides, including our personal introductions in classic tour guide fashion. (*Cooper Manley, International Studies and Political Science major with a love for the city of Charlotte (my hometown) and our amazing campus.*)

My first campus tour was during Levine Finalists weekend. I still remember how much of an impact my Niner Guide had on my initial impression of UNC Charlotte, bringing a sort of energy and enthusiasm that quickly spread throughout the group, making me eager to become a part of the community. Engaging us in personal stories and jokes about the "freshman 15 and freshman 20 from the various dining facilities," by the end of the tour I pictured myself as a student on campus, something I hadn't thought was possible in such a short amount of time. After becoming a Levine Scholar and learning about my new home, I started to look for ways to give back to campus and my fellow Niners, which is when I came across the application to become a Niner Guide. Thinking back to my own experience, I couldn't think of a better way to spend my time, giving back to a school that's already opened up so many doors for me and helping prospective students and families to catch a glimpse into what their futures could be like here at UNC Charlotte. (*Allison File, a freshman from Denver, NC, and am majoring in Mechanical Engineering.*)

Being a part of the Niner Guide program has added to my experience as a freshman on a college campus because it introduced me to the various things happening on campus that many students, especially freshman, aren't aware of. For example, the University Career Center hosts events year-round to assist students in finding



Top:
Mya, Kira, Allison,
and Cooper beam
with pride as they
prepare to lead tour
groups across UNC
Charlotte's campus.

Bottom:
Cooper, Mya,
and Allison give
the pickaxe as
they finish leading
groups on EXPOLORE
UNC Charlotte.



and landing internships, jobs, and even graduate school programs, in addition, they maintain a professional clothing closet available to all students on campus. Another example is the Atkins Library which provides technology and learning spaces for students, providing access to specialized equipment and offering classes and workshops for students to gain new and unique skills. Through being a Niner Guide, I am able to use this knowledge to introduce both prospective and current students to all that UNC Charlotte has to offer and provide insight as to how to make the most out of the four years spent at UNC Charlotte.

The one thing I am most excited about as a member of the Niner Guide program is the opportunity to connect with prospective students. Whether it be through daily campus tours, open houses, or admission events, we are able to talk with prospective students, learn their stories, and have a positive impact in their college decision. (*Kira Chiles, a freshman majoring in Pre-Kinesiology from Columbia, SC.*)

My favorite part about being a Niner Guide is the ability to bring excitement to the faces of prospective students. The process of college admissions is challenging and stressful for many students. One year ago, I was in the same shoes, walking around college campuses with my parents and wondering where I would end up. I was a bundle of nerves and anxiety as I entered the office of admissions and signed in to take my tour. As a tour guide, I can eliminate the worries students have about college by answering their questions and concerns and also sharing with them some of my fun experiences here so far. For example, since being at UNC Charlotte, I attended my first outdoor concert, I tried Bojangles and Cookout for the first time, I've eaten breakfast for dinner at 10 o'clock at night with friends, grabbed a chocolate pudding at Sovi dining hall every day for dessert, and have made many lifetime friends and memories. I love sharing my experiences with prospective students as it helps them envision their own lives as a student here. At the end of the tour, I love to see guests leaving happier and more relaxed than when they arrived. Overall, knowing I may have impacted a big decision in their life is one of the best parts about being a Niner Guide. (*Mya Mitchell, a freshman from Bowie, Maryland. I am majoring in Civil Engineering and minoring in French.*)

THE EXPERIENCE OF GROWTH

By Aaron Raye '22



Aaron relaxes as he enjoys local graffiti in Australia Summer 2019.



Standing at the Qantas terminal in Sydney, Australia half a world away from Texas on my 19th birthday, and hearing the overhead speaker announce “Your flight has been canceled,” left me stunned. This was the last thing I was expecting, but my surprise quickly turned toward action as I swiftly joined the mass of humanity rushing toward the customer service desk. I had to quickly problem-solve and think on my feet to find a way back home.

While waiting eight hours in the airport for a flight to Dallas, I had the chance to not only reflect on my internship but also on my first year at UNC Charlotte.

The biggest thing I have learned thus far as a Levine Scholar has been that perfection is impossible~ but with a willingness to embrace every experience you can grow.

My experiences in Australia served as a culmination of an amazing summer internship with a groundbreaking organization: High Resolves- a nonprofit that is dedicated to inoculating young people against hatred.

Working for an Australian-based global citizenship organization that is challenging the modern system of education around the world has been an experience like no other. The contributions from people all over the world truly make this organization special, and the spirit of constant innovation and entrepreneurship has helped mold me into the person that I am today. Ever since I decided to embark on this journey with High Resolves, I have been constantly challenged with growing a mission bigger than myself and tasked with working through the challenges of the modern education system. I remember on the second day of my work in Australia, I was asked to stand in front of the North American team, as well as some of the organization’s global executives, and present my ideas for how to improve the growth strategy in North America.

While I was surprised to be given the spotlight to voice my ideas to the team, I was prepared with countless hours of research into the U.S. school system and conversations I had with the team in the first part of my internship with High Resolves in New Orleans. It’s one of those things we all dream of ~ the moment where you speak your ideas freely and have a group of industry professionals listen to your ideas - and actually take measures to begin implementing them.



During his study abroad semester in Budapest, Hungary, Aaron visits the city center of Bratislava, Slovakia (top left) and enjoys overlooking the city of Budapest (bottom left) Spring 2020.



Aaron Raye takes part in the Ed Summit 2019 in Melbourne, Australia, learning and sharing about the benefits of implementing global citizenship curriculum in modern education.

I came away from both my New Orleans and Australian internships with confidence that I'd be able to help extend High Resolves programming into Charlotte schools- but to be leading the charge was an opportunity that I could've only imagined.

After the summer experiences, I became a frequent visitor in the halls of many schools in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School system (and beyond), working to share with as many educators as possible that High Resolves programming is a vital tool that can be used to effectively combat hatred.

The premise of growing a business was something that has always enticed me, but my work with High Resolves has helped me realize that a business lens can be applied to social enterprise: Making for a combination of interests that both serves my personal narrative to improve modern education while helping to build my business skills.

I've consulted teachers on ways to implement the vast curriculum of High Resolves into their Civics, History, English, government and advisory classes. Seeing the programming in action, however, has been the most rewarding part of this journey. In Australia, I sat in a beautiful middle school that was just outside the center city of Melbourne and watched as kids began to break down barriers between classmates and collectively brainstormed ways to solve pressing issues. They discussed why racism, unconscious bias and discrimination exist and voiced how they are the ones responsible and capable to be the positive change that society needs. I stood in the classroom and listened as I became more and more confident that the young people of today not only have the drive to make the world a better place but they also have the ability, they just need to be given the right tools.

Growing High Resolves in Charlotte has been my proudest accomplishment in college to date. This work has inspired me to continue to push my civic engagement project to new heights - to reach more schools in the Queen city until all young people are equipped and supported with the tools and space to make the world a better place.

My work with High Resolves has been the gateway to new prospects, as it has helped me identify my skill and interest in helping



Aaron and High Resolves program director Danitra Wansley stand in front of Bradford Preparatory School teachers in Charlotte, NC delivering a teacher development session on global education Spring 2019.

organizations grow. Growth is not easy. It's awkward, uneven and sometimes unexpected. Just as I felt in the unknown hours of sitting in the Sydney airport. But, I pushed through. I've found that having an open mind and a positive attitude can be the pieces needed to turn every challenge, test or tribulation into an opportunity for development, as a scholar and as a human being.

I am excited to employ this attitude toward my upcoming semester abroad in Budapest, Hungary, where I'll be learning more about an Central European culture that has been traditionally demonized by western media and schools of thought. I'll also be spending time in London this summer where I'll be interning with a consulting firm and helping to grow their business in other European countries as well as time in NYC, working with an education innovation startup called ImpactED.

None of these opportunities would have been possible without the guidance, support and motivation of the Levine Scholars program. Because of this scholarship I've traveled to new countries and been able to grow and develop into a better person. But perhaps the most important thing is that I've grown into a community of people who are doing similar things and have embraced me and helped to push me to new heights in my game of growth.

THE UPSIDE of “NO”

By Laren Martin '22

No. A blunt two-letter word that carries so much power and typically results in disappointment. However, during my freshman year, I had an experience that taught me that hearing “no” might not always be a bad thing. When deciding which Charlotte-based nonprofit organization to intern with, my number one choice informed me that “no,” they were not looking for a summer intern. Therefore, I had to move on to my second choice, EmpowHERment. I was optimistic about my new assignment but could not help but wonder in the back of my mind if this organization was going to be the best fit for me. It was not until after my initial meeting with the Executive Director, Mrs. Tiffany Allen, that I knew EmpowHERment was exactly where I was meant to be.

My first day was anything but easy; I was immediately thrown into the fast-paced environment of working for a small nonprofit. Mrs. Allen and I spent the morning going over EmpowHERment’s annual operating budget for the past three years as well as breaking down their logic model and strategic plans. Later that day, we had a lunch meeting with the Board of Directors’ Chair as well as a new contact from KPMG (Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler, a Big 4 International accounting firm), a potential partnership in the making that would be a great source of additional funds. After a productive lunch, we then rushed over to a nearby Chipotle Mexican Grill for EmpowHERment’s first fundraiser of the season. After spending several hours handing out flyers and informing people of EmpowHERment’s mission, we had a quick debrief about my first of many busy days. The common theme throughout all of my activities for the day was funding, emphasizing the importance of resources to a small nonprofit like EmpowHERment. And so, a few weeks later, when a representative from Aetna Health informed us EmpowHERment had been anonymously selected to compete against four other nonprofits within the Charlotte area for a grand prize of \$20,000, it seemed too good to be true.

The competition is known as Aetna Voices of Health. Each organization was asked to create a 60-second video describing its mission. The winner was selected on the basis of who received the most votes. When Mrs. Allen appointed me as project manager for our video, I felt a rush of excitement but also a nagging lack of confidence in myself simply due to the importance of the project. However, the trust that Mrs. Allen placed in me made me realize that it was time for me to show up and rise to the occasion. Nail, the other intern in the office, and I worked tirelessly on drafting a version of the video, and as expected, once we were finished Mrs. Allen provided a detailed list of things she wanted us to revise. After repeating this cycle a number of times, we finally had a completed video. And on Thursday, July 11, 2019, I breathed a sigh of relief as I watched the red loading bar on my computer officially upload our video to YouTube. Now that the hard work was done, all that was left to do was patiently wait for the votes to roll in.

While we waited for the competition to open to the public, we made ourselves busy with other tasks and engagements. EmpowHERment was invited to participate in a back-to-school event hosted by Live 360 at Northlake Mall titled “BeYOUtiful.” The event focused on reminding participants, especially young females, that they are beautiful both inside and out. EmpowHERment was excited to attend this event as it allowed us to expand our reach as well as spread the word about our upcoming Annual Summit. I was tasked with creating a fun, interactive activity for our booth while also serving as the representative for EmpowHERment during the event. BeYOUtiful was a wonderful way to conclude my internship as it allowed me to give back to the organization by informing others of the incredible work that EmpowHERment accomplishes on a daily basis.

Thinking back on it now, if I were to go through the process of becoming an intern at EmpowHERment all again, I would have done it exactly the same way. I believe my experience taught me that things can still work out even if they do not go exactly as planned. I was so pleased by the outcome of my internship with EmpowHERment and loved how they truly welcomed me into their family. In fact, I am still in close contact with many of them to this day. Next time you hear “no” do not think about what you are being rejected from but instead think about what new doors have potentially opened.

As a side note, I am ecstatic to say that we placed first in the video competition, winning the grand prize of \$20,000—not too bad for a couple of interns if I do say so myself.



From the top: Lauren speaks to a crowd of onlookers about EmpowHERment’s event BeYOUtiful and EmpowHERment’s involvement with the community. Lauren speaks to a group of young high school students participating in an EmpowHERment Leadership Academy concerning possible career tracks post high school. Lauren (third from right), sits with Executive Director and Founder of EmpowHERment Tiffany Allen-Potts (second from right) and EmpowHERment volunteers at a Chipotle fundraiser for their annual summit. Lauren interacts with a young girl during EmpowHERment’s event BeYOUtiful, writing positive affirmations for herself and other young girls. Lauren Martin and an EmpowHERment mentee prepare for the BeYOUtiful event- promoting positive thoughts and encouragement for young girls.

BIG MEN THINK PINK

By Miles Shen '22

I was “thinking pink” as I stood straight and tall wearing a pink tie around my collar and a pink ribbon pinned to my lapel. I was a statue, frozen and tense, from anticipation. I couldn’t see the crowd because of the blinding lights, but I could feel their gaze. The room was silent as the judge opened the envelope, and a single bead of sweat rolled from my forehead and off my brow. I was vying against fifteen other college men. The silence was broken, and a voice could be heard saying, “The next ‘Big Man on Campus’ is...”

It all began with Zeta Tau Alpha, a women’s fraternity, hosting the annual Big Man on Campus event at UNC Charlotte. Not only am I a Levine Scholar, but I am also a fraternity man. To become more connected and to grow my family within the UNC Charlotte community, I decided to “go Greek.” In the spring semester of my freshman year, I became a brother of the Sigma Tau Gamma fraternity.

Becoming a part of Sigma Tau Gamma has added to my college experience. Whether I spend time studying with a brother, working out with a group at the University Recreation Center, or raising funds for our national philanthropy, Special Olympics, the fraternity keeps me busy.

Greek life is like a big family. Fraternities and sororities are unique from each other; yet, one common attribute is the considerable and aspiring support amongst Greeks within one another’s philanthropies and community events.

I first heard about the Big Man on Campus event from one of my fraternity brothers. I don’t like competitions, so I was reluctant to compete. But before I knew it, the entire fraternity wanted me to represent them in the Big Man on Campus event. After a bit of convincing, I became Sigma Tau Gamma’s representative.

Zeta Tau Alpha’s national philanthropy is breast cancer education and awareness. As part of Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October, Zeta Tau Alpha hosts a Big Man on Campus fundraising event. Big Man on Campus is a collegiate, all-male talent competition, where contestants compete to raise funds for breast cancer education and awareness.

When I learned that the event would be supporting the fight against breast cancer, it struck a chord with me. My piano teacher for over 15 years is a breast cancer survivor. Because she has been an important person throughout my life, I was compelled to do this. In her honor, I decided I would play the piano to showcase my talent.

The day of the Big Man on Campus event finally arrived, and the pageant opened with an amusing, synchronized dance. All sixteen of us contestants practiced our dance moves together a few days before we were all on stage. Even though I have two left feet, I still enjoyed participating.

Once the opening dance concluded, I was up first for the talent portion. It was only fitting to choose one of my piano teacher’s favorite

Miles Shen and Lauren Martin ('22) celebrate after Miles is crowned Big Man on Campus 2019-2020.



Miles Shen enjoys his new celebrity status, as his fraternity brothers huddle around him in excitement.



pieces, “By the Sea” by George Posca. When I stepped on stage and introduced myself, I couldn’t help but smile. I sat on the bench, placed my fingers on the keys, and then completely forgot where I was. My fingers danced up and down the keyboard, and for a moment, I was back in the piano studio with my teacher by my side. I completed my performance with the sound of the audience cheering and clapping, and I took my bow.

Lastly, there was the question segment. I was asked, “What is the most ideal time to wake up in the morning?” After consideration, I said, “6 A.M.” Literally, everyone groaned. I quickly explained, “There’s never enough time in the day, and waking up early gives me more time!” I thought to myself, “Oh no! I messed that up.” I had accepted defeat, but that didn’t keep every muscle in my body from clenching as I stood next to my fellow contestants.

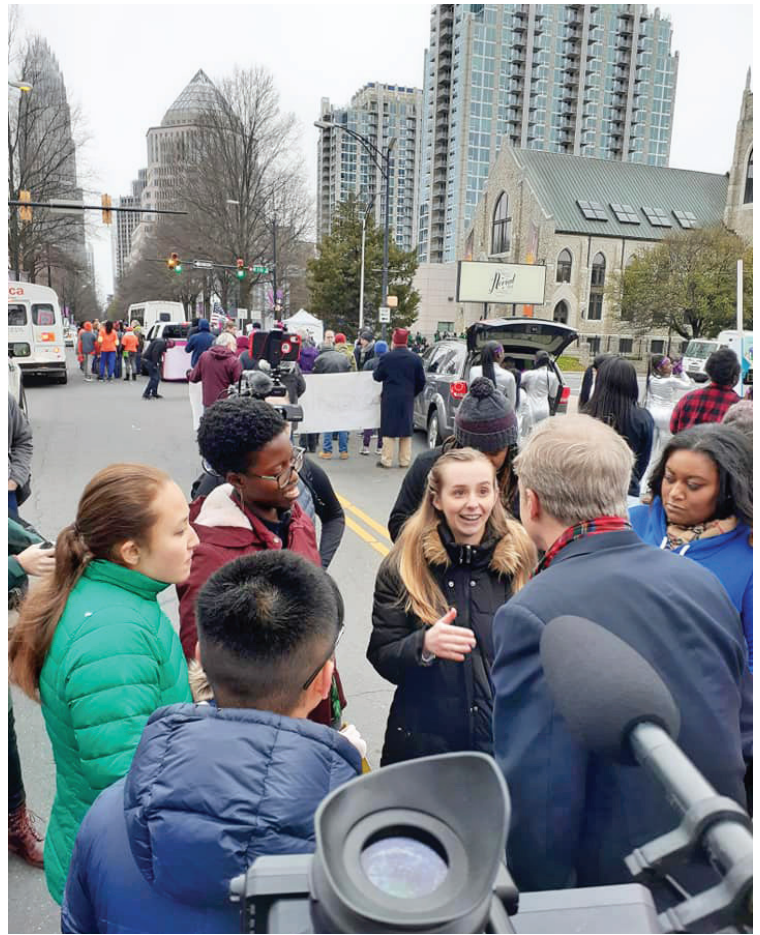
It was the moment of truth. The next “Big Man on Campus” was about to be announced. We all waited in anticipation. The speaker opened the envelope, and read, “The next ‘Big Man on Campus’ is... Miles Shen!” I was in disbelief. Did I just hear my name? The room ignited with cheers, and dozens of my fraternity brothers rushed the stage.

I was selected as UNC Charlotte’s 2019 Big Man on Campus and am now a proud owner of a gold crown and pink sash. I am honored to have participated in such a fun-filled and humorous event. That night will always be in my memory, but above all, I will always “think pink” in the fight against breast cancer.

REFLECTING ON EXPERIENCE AS A JOURNALIST

By Megan Bird '20

Megan Bird puts her journalism skills in action as she interviews a key player for a Niner Times newspaper article in Uptown Charlotte Fall 2019.



The nearly universal endeavor of college freshmen is to piece together the quintessential undergraduate experience. As we prepare to enter college, we're berated by nostalgic comments like "Those were the best years of my life!" or "My freshman year roommate became my maid of honor!"

Message received, guys. College better be incredible because it's only downhill from here.

As part of my master plan in crafting a perfect four years, I sought out a student organization that would fulfill my interests and connect me with new friends. I tried UNCC Democrats, club field hockey, earth club, tutoring organizations, and the running club. All were fun but not as organized and tight knit as I had hoped (except for the running club, but that one was off the list when they revealed their 30-mile-a-week schedule).

It wasn't until my second semester of college that I gave the student newspaper, the Niner Times, a try. The first meeting in the basement of the Student Union was promising: I found a bustling newsroom with papers flying, people furiously typing, and lots and lots of laughing. I envisioned it as an opportunity to do meaningful work and meet new people.

As soon as I expressed interest in writing for the news section, I was assigned my first story: a professor emerita would be giving a talk on her experience living in three different concentration camps during the Holocaust. Quite a daunting topic for someone who didn't even know what "AP style" meant, but I was eager to tackle it.

It was exhilarating to write something that felt important ~ something not confined by an arbitrary grading system or an esoteric, uninteresting writing prompt. I continued to chase that feeling, writing as frequently as I could. Before I had even really figured out what AP style was, I was asked to serve as assistant news editor.

The months that ensued truly brought meaning to the phrase "learning on the job," but I loved every moment of my newfound responsibility and happily accepted the editor position the following semester.

Now I was not only charged with reporting on the news, but I also had to find it and organize writers to report it. I had to make careful considerations about conflicts of interest, appearances of biases, maintain good connections with sources – all the while trying to figure out what really qualified as "news."

During the first months of my tenure, I wrote about everything from an apartment complex that forced many of its tenants out of housing to Hurricane Florence's destructive path through North Carolina to the challenges facing the Lumbee community. I somehow even found time to implement the newspaper's first translation team to make our articles accessible to Spanish speakers.

Quickly (but not fast enough) I began to realize the terrifying power I had to really affect people's lives. What may seem like a simple decision to report the name of a UNCC basketball player convicted of assault on a female turned into a grueling internal debate about when my obligation to uncover the truth was bounded by an ethical consideration to the people in my community. I wanted to be seen

as a competitor of local newspapers, but at the same time I had no formal training or even prior experience in journalism. All I had was my passion for it and a perhaps stubborn desire to be the best news editor the Niner Times had seen.

Even with these challenges, I was enjoying my job so much that, to my colleagues' dismay, I decided to keep the position while I studied abroad in Granada, Spain.

If I hadn't already realized the difficulties of being a news writer, that spring semester would make them glaringly apparent. The biggest news in Niner Times history broke while I, the news editor, was 4,000 miles away: there had been a shooting on campus, leaving two dead and four others injured.

The news broke around 2:00am when I was lying in a hostel bunk bed in Salerno, Italy, ready to begin my spring break trip. The next few days were some of the hardest I've ever experienced, as I simultaneously watched my study abroad friends enjoy the most anticipated part of the semester while worrying about my Niner Times colleagues (and close friends) putting themselves in emotional and physical harm's way to report on the tragedy. It felt like I was living a double life, ferrying along the Amalfi Coast by day and transcribing interviews with shooting survivors by night.

When I returned to school for my second year as news editor, I was so relieved to be back in the Niner Times community. I gladly threw myself back into the position, interviewing Beto O'Rourke, former Guantanamo Bay Warden John Bogdan, and all types of people in-between. I worked without any backwards glances toward the tragedy that had rattled our newsroom just a few months before.

The plan was going well until I attended the shooter's trial. In journalistic fashion, I sat in the courtroom with one hand scribbling away on my legal pad and the other comforting the crying girl next to me. I had one quick sob on the phone with my dad and turned around for a Niner Times meeting, where I spent nearly an hour debating with my editor about what parts of the defense attorney's story were appropriate to publish.

The news editor position has been my most demanding role as an undergraduate, but no situation has been as difficult as that. Releasing stories that might anger the Chancellor's office and spending hours on the phone with the Student Press Law Center were not intimidating to me anymore. I was learning in public, but I was doing it alongside some of my closest friends.

I know now that if there is any quintessential college experience, it's working for a newspaper. It develops you morally, socially, and academically (knowing the Chancellor will read your article is the surest way to improve your writing – and fast). It introduces you to incredibly interesting people and gives you lifelong friends. And no matter what happens, you've gotta get that paper out each week.

I still can't say whether these will be the best years of my life (although maybe I should accept that they will be as I inch dangerously close to a career as a lawyer), but I can confidently see a future for myself where I look jealousy at that recent high school graduate and declare "My years working for the college newspaper were some of the most transformative of my life."



Megan poses for a photo after speaking with presidential candidate Beto O'Rourke in Charlotte Fall 2019.



Megan (center) and other Niner Times Newspaper staff join in UNC Charlotte's Goldrush, welcoming new students to campus Fall 2019.

AIFS: A SEMESTER ABROAD TO PRE-PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

By Dmitry Tereshenko '21



International experience and exposure is a staple of the “Levine experience.” I’ve always been told that studying abroad is transformative, life-changing, and unforgettable. Now that I am coming to the conclusion of my third year in the program, studying abroad is no longer a fantasy, but rather a part of my reality. The stories and experiences are now mine to share, they have become a part of who I am, and my role of eager listener has transformed to that of the story-teller.

I have been a part of the Levine Scholars Program for three years now, receiving constant support and encouragement from the program, being pushed to embrace my interests and ideas, to create new experiences, and to pave my own path while in undergrad. A significant staple to my experience in the program has been my journey with international education. I have now participated in two summer faculty-led programs, the first to Stellenbosch, South Africa and the second to Jerusalem, Israel. In-between these programs, I also managed to squeeze in a semester long program to St. Petersburg, Russia.

Why I Chose to Go to St. Petersburg, Russia I vividly remember the moment I decided to study in Russia. Ironically enough, it was while I was summiting a mountain hike with Dr. Zablotzky and other scholars at the Cape of Good Hope, the most South-Western point on the African Continent. The jaw dropping beauty

of the landscape around me, the comradery of pushing through a hike with close friends, and the vibrant realization of where I was inspired me to take on another adventure, to fly off to the eastern most corner of Europe.

As a Ukrainian-American, my decision to study in Russia was personal, going beyond my desire for a nuanced educational experience. It was my goal to connect with my family’s heritage and to increase my Russian proficiency. Living in the U.S as a second generation immigrant can sometimes be challenging and can feel like you just don’t quite fit in. Your nationality, your ethnicity, and your family’s history can feel as if they are in conflict. Growing up, I knew that I belonged where I was, considering the U.S is a multi-ethnic place, but I always felt at odds and disconnected from a deeper sense of who I was. I was geographically and socially distanced from the culture and community that my dad grew up in. The program I ultimately chose, brought me to the Polytechnic Institute of Peter the Great in St. Petersburg through AIFS (formally known as the American Institute for Foreign Study). On January 27th, 2019 I packed my bags, grabbed my passport, and hopped on a plane that brought me to Russia.

From Student to Pre-Professional Experience. Over the course of the past year, my relationship with AIFS has grown and changed. Toward the end of my Spring 2019 semester, I applied to be an



From left to right:

Dmitry (first row) stands with the Southeastern United States Region AIFS alumni ambassador's during their annual training in Stamford, CT Fall, 2019.

Dmitry Tereshenko shares his love of Moscow as he walks through the Red Square in front of St. Basil's Cathedral.

Dmitry displays the UNC Charlotte pickaxe as he tours the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, Russia.

Dmitry enjoys a study break by taking a walk on the frozen Volga River.

Dmitry (far right fourth row), stands with his class of AIFS alumni ambassador's during an annual ambassador training in Stamford, CT Fall, 2019.

AIFS Alumni Ambassador. The program is essentially a collaborative pre-professional, almost internship-like, experience where you work with a nation-wide team of permanent AIFS staff members and approximately forty students around the U.S who have completed at least one AIFS study abroad program. Out of my cohort of forty ambassadors, we have representation across twenty-one different AIFS programs, spanning sixteen different countries, and coming from thirty-eight different universities within the U.S.

Working for AIFS, has given me the opportunity to work with a highly collaborative team of hard-working individuals, centered on the ideals and values of equality, representation, and a genuine heart-felt connection to the importance of international educational experiences in higher education. The requirements of the program include finishing a minimum of an 80-hour time commitment to the program over the course of two semesters, completing an intensive two day in-person training at the AIFS headquarters in Stamford, Connecticut, serving as an active connection between AIFS and the study abroad office at your home institution, developing and distributing programming and information regarding studying abroad, particularly focusing on underrepresented communities at our university, creating blog and vlog entries capturing elements of our study abroad experiences, and participating in regular professional development phone calls and workshops. The

primary goal of the program is for ambassadors to serve as advocates for international education, regardless of where or with which program prospective students ultimately choose.

What I've Gained from my Experience as an Alumni Ambassador at UNC Charlotte. Working for AIFS has been the best decision I could have made to unpack my study abroad experiences. Studying abroad truly is a transformative experience. It pushes the boundaries of your growing world view, exposes you to the inner working mechanisms of a different culture and community, and gives you the opportunity to introspectively understand yourself in a setting outside of your normal comforts. Regardless of where you go, how many classes you take, or whom you go with, studying abroad is impactful.

Working for AIFS has not only given me the time, space, and ability to reflect on my own experiences but has also given me a chance to gain experience in a field of work that has become extremely meaningful to me. They took a chance on me as one of their students who decided to explore the cold terrain of a St. Petersburg winter and have helped guide me through a pre-professional program, helping me better understand myself, and how to take my experiences and utilize them going forward.

Research in ARGENTINA

By Maria Cruzat and Samantha Lee, Class of 2020

As part of the Levine Scholars Program Research Mentorship Initiative (LSP RMI), we had the opportunity to conduct research with Dr. Colleen Hammelman, Associate Professor in the Department of Geography and Earth Sciences, on urban agriculture and agroecology in Rosario, Argentina. The opportunity was a formative experience for both of us as it cultivated our research skills and fed our intellectual curiosity.

Maria: I became interested in Dr. Hammelman's research as it looked into the impacts of agroecology. I wanted to learn about ecological practices and its contribution to more sustainable agroecosystems. Having studied abroad in Chile, I was eager to return to South America and dig deeper into food production and its role in social justice. With interests to continue in cross-cultural exchanges and international research after graduation, I wanted to receive mentorship in best practices.

Sam: Early on in my college career, I was able to do a study abroad spring break trip to Bolivia focused on research, and for that class, I had written a paper about eco-tourism in Bolivia. From then on, I knew that I was interested in how environmental issues interact with other social issue. I applied this in further classes, and I eventually studied abroad again - this time for two semesters in Argentina, improving my Spanish skills and my background in South America. The opportunity with Dr. Hammelman seemed like the perfect marriage of these two interests.

Our involvement with the LSP RMI started with a semester, filled with gathering as much information as we could on the research topic. We spent our spring semester meeting with our mentor to read current scholarly and grey literature on urban agriculture and agroecology, Argentina's history, politics, and economics, and the past and current agricultural presence in Rosario. Dr. Hammelman also guided us through the process of conducting ethical, qualitative research and working with the community. We were introduced to the university International Review Board process to ensure we utilized ethical practices in our research methodology and prepared questions for semi-structured interviews and community meetings based on our literature review. Through this process, we learned of the value of reviewing current information on our research topic, as it was essential in guiding our research questions and being grounded in knowledge before entering the country.

While in Argentina, we spent three weeks visiting urban gardeners and peri-urban farmers in and around Rosario. We conducted interviews with government officials, gardeners, farmers, researchers, and members of local NGOs as well as held a community meeting with several farmers. It was a whirlwind of a trip. We had a plethora of opportunities to use our Spanish knowledge while diving deep into the world of agriculture in Rosario. By the end of our fieldwork, we had conversations with over 30 key informants, visited numerous gardens, farms, and agricultural hubs, and immersed ourselves in the city of Rosario. Our community partners introduced us to local food and drink like empanadas, medialunas, and mate. We also had the delight of trying many of the fresh, agroecological vegetables produced on the gardens and farms. Who knew research would lead to feeding both our minds and stomachs!

Upon arriving back to the United States, we dove into transcribing and translating the interviews and community meeting. This allowed us to code and analyze our data. Along the way, we presented our experience and findings at the Applied Geography Conference hosted in Charlotte in Fall of 2019 among researchers from around the world. We are now working on writing a paper to publish our research findings and contribute to the conversation on urban agriculture and agroecology.

The experience expanded our interest in future research and gave us the tools to be successful in conducting our own research as we are given the opportunity to be involved from the initial processes of the research to publication. It also solidified both of our interests in environmental issues and emphasized issues surrounding food production and the environment in our everyday lives, motivating us to be more conscientious global citizens. This experience is a quintessential example of the opportunities that the Levine Scholars Program has afforded us, and we are humbled and thankful. We have also found the mentorship of Dr. Hammelman invaluable as we learned the principles of research and shared in the exciting process.



From the top: Maria and Samantha proudly present their research findings at the Applied Geography Conference in Charlotte, NC Fall of 2019.

Maria, Dr. Hammelman (center) and Samantha enjoy presenting their research findings at the Applied Geography Conference in Charlotte, NC Fall of 2019.

Maria and Samantha conduct research in Rosario, Argentina at a local urban garden.

A snapshot of the agro-research they conducted in Rosario, Argentina.

Maria and Samantha enjoy produce from local urban farms in Rosario, Argentina.

REFLECTING ON THE PAST *Reaching Toward the Future*

By Caitlin Vaverek Downs, Alumna, Class of 2014

Ten years ago when I first stepped foot onto UNC Charlotte's campus as a member of the first class of Levine Scholars, I had no idea what the next four years would hold. I could only imagine the impact that the scholarship would have on my college career, but I could not yet fathom how the influence of the other scholars and the program itself would carry far beyond my time in Charlotte.

Undoubtedly, some of my best college memories came as a direct result of the program. I hiked 25 days through the wilderness of Wyoming, excavated at an archeological site near the Zion gate in Jerusalem, and joined my civic engagement grant with others' to found UNC Charlotte's first dance marathon, which still continues to raise money for the Levine Children's Hospital today. These are just a few of the numerous experiences I was granted as a scholar, and while each of these helped to shape me, little by little, into the person I am today, it was my fellow scholars that made each of those experiences as memorable as they were.

In the years that have followed graduation from UNC Charlotte, I, along with many fellow alumni, have looked for ways to stay involved with the Levine Scholars Program. I've personally loved the opportunities I've had to interact with the current scholars. Whether it's

Caitlin (back row, third from the left) and other Levine Scholars enjoy the first LSP Summer digging on Mt. Zion in Jerusalem June, 2013.



giving feedback on a Senior's post-graduate fellowship application, chatting with an upperclassman about graduate school programs, or traveling back to Charlotte to take part in Finalist weekend each year, I'm always energized by the interactions I've had with the scholars who have come after me.

Recently, the Levine Alumni Council was formed to continue efforts to connect the 86 alumni with current scholars and with each other. Comprised of 15 members representing every alumni class from 2014-2020, the council will work diligently to improve communication with the program, plan regional service opportunities, organize networking events, and initiate fundraisers in the cities we currently call home. We'll aspire to serve as professional contacts for current scholars seeking resources for life after college, and we'll connect with each other in cities around the country to devise ways to broaden the impact we have in our communities.

With strengthened connections, we'll bridge the gap between Levine Scholar and Alumni, continuing to give back in a small way to the program that first gave each of us so much.

Climbing the Mountain of CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

By Noah Shaver '20

As a freshman coming into the Levine Scholars Program, the civic engagement project seems like one of those mountainous things you don't know if you can climb. You're 18 years old and someone is telling you that you have to complete a project that will cost more than many times the sum of your bank account. You're not sure who you will partner with for the project or how you will ever have enough technical knowledge to pull it off.

Once you get further along in the program you realize that the Levine Scholars Program has been training you for these situations over the previous years. You've climbed those mountains during NOLS, you've made those relationships during your nonprofit internship, and you've gained the necessary technical experience through your pre-professional internship. After looking at it from this perspective, you can understand that the Levine Scholars Program has laid out the framework for your project before you even knew it.

As a senior in Civil Engineering, I wasn't sure which direction to take my civic engagement project. There didn't seem to be any openings that matched my interest, but then I started my nonprofit internship. The wonderful thing about the civic engagement project is that it can't be successful if you're attempting to match your wants to the project, it's successful when you match your talents to the needs of the community. This is exactly what I did after my nonprofit internship with Catawba Lands Conservancy and Carolina Thread Trail when a kayak and canoe ramp was taken out by flooding. I saw a need in the community with the destruction of a valued public access to nature that allowed me to apply my technical talent as a Civil Engineer through the design and construction

of a new kayak ramp that is resistant to frequent flooding. The design of the new access had to consider the harsh conditions that frequent flooding brings, such as: the loads applied by rushing water, the deterioration of wood, erosion of the river bank, and poor soil conditions due to constant saturation. To account for these issues, I went to my professors and industry professionals that I had contact with through my internships to determine what the best option would be. The final design was a driven pile foundation adaptation that would reach the bedrock beneath the sandy river bank to provide stability for years to come, regardless of flooding. The design process required a lot of phone calls and emails, but the final product was a structure we can be confident will stand tall through it all.

None of this would have been possible without the hard work of my nonprofit partners and the staff of the Levine Scholars Program. A unique opportunity we have as Levine Scholars is that we can partner with other scholars on our projects to combine our talents, funds, and efforts. I partnered with Seth Whitley, another senior Levine Scholar who is also a Civil Engineer. With his help, we met a need in the community that could possibly have taken years to fix if grant money was relied on through the nonprofit, but thanks to the Levine Scholars Program the need was met and exceeded in a timely manner. The civic engagement project is something that defines us as scholars. It culminates all of our experiences over our four years and provides us with the best reward: giving back to the community that's given so much to us by meeting their needs with our specific talents.

Noah beams with pride as he continues work on his Civic Engagement project and partnership with Catawba Lands Conservancy and Carolina Thread Trail Spring 2020.



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 Group Photo Fall 2019. Classes of '20, '21, '22, and '23.

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.