

THE ART-O-MAT: NEW INTERACTIONS WITHIN UNC CHARLOTTE'S ART SCENE

By Danielle Walden '22

The late spring semester of 2020 was a time of maximum uncertainty. The sudden shift to remote classes had begun. At that point, I was finishing up my sophomore year, mourning the loss of a canceled study abroad trip to Rome, and still utterly unsure of what I was to do for my civic engagement project.

Luckily, inspiration typically strikes in the unlikeliest of places. For me, it started with a single PowerPoint slide. Presented by my Printmaking professor during one of our virtual class sessions, I read the title in bold print: "The Art-o-Mat Machine." My professor had stitched together a wide variety of out-of-the-ordinary artistic phenomena to inspire us for our newest project. This single slide intrigued me. I listened as he explained what the Art-o-Mat machines were, how they were created, and how they became a popular addition to many campuses, breweries, and museums worldwide.

After class, I meditated on the presentation a bit more. I felt that the arts scene at UNC Charlotte lacked that type of engagement. Whether you are a College of Arts and Architecture student or not, being an art audience is still a very passive visual practice. In the six different art galleries operating on UNC Charlotte's campus (one of which is located in the Center City Building in uptown Charlotte), visitors are almost always prohibited from touching or engaging with the artwork. It is, of course, a necessary practice intended to protect the art and respect the artist. It is nonetheless a practice that I feel is best used in tandem with other, more interactive installations. When I learned about the Art-o-Mat, I thought it was a brilliant way to break down some of the barriers that separate viewers from inaccessible museum and gallery walls.

The Art-o-Mat business was created by Clark Whittington, a North



Carolinian artist from Concord who is currently based in Winston-Salem. The Art-o-Mat is a well-known series of refurbished vintage cigarette vending machines. Instead of cigarette boxes, the artist rebuilds these machines to hold small pieces of art printed on wooden blocks. Anyone can walk up to a machine, insert a \$1 or \$5 bill (or token, in some places), and turn a knob to access artwork that fits in the palm of their hand. Through the machines, art is quite literally made to be more accessible and interactive for general audiences, at a much lower price than many museum tickets or art auctions. Independent artists around the world who create art solely for the machines are automatically benefitted from every purchase of their pieces. The machine's host benefits from the profits and receives a small portion of each purchase. I researched institutions that hosted Art-o-Mat machines and eventually reached out to my professor to express my interest in bringing a machine to our campus.

Bringing an Art-o-Mat to UNC Charlotte brings accessible and intriguing art to both the general public and the student body. Contemporary culture understandably worships monetization. Contemporary culture has become more structured around monetization, and as a result, even forms of expression have become commodified. It goes without saying that it has become increasingly difficult to make time for hobbies that aren't profitable in some way. Historically, art has primarily served as a tool for institutional profit and socio-political capital. This type of functionality-stressing mentality is what inspired Clark Whittington to create the Art-o-Mat. By refurbishing these cigarette machines, they become less of a tool to distribute capitalist items for immediate consumption and disposal and more of a tool to spread beautiful and whimsical things. Placing a machine on campus would support a North Carolinian artist's vision of distributing more art to community members and remind us that art can exist for art's sake.

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As such, my civic engagement project was born. In hearing my interest in the Art-o-Mat, my professor agreed that such a project would be highly beneficial in expanding the art scene of the UNC Charlotte community. He volunteered to help me facilitate the project and started by introducing me to another professor who was, coincidentally, a close family friend of Clark Whittington. A flurry of emails and a series of virtual meetings later, the “UNC Charlotte Art-o-Mat” project was approved by the Levine Program, the UNC Charlotte Department of Art and Architecture, and the artist himself. We were officially on the way to having one of the machines placed on the UNC Charlotte campus. Our project didn’t stop there, however.

The closer I approach graduation as an Illustration major, the more I realize that my peers are mostly unsure of what waits for them on the other side of college. The Illustration concentration is perhaps the most versatile of the Studio Art major concentrations, with its possible careers ranging from criminal sketch artists to fashion designers to video game concept artists. Due to the range of industry and its competitive nature, many students barely know where to start. For some of them, networking may be the main barrier, but others may not be aware of specific jobs and internships that are harder to find. To bridge this gap, I began brainstorming ways to help future art majors navigate the complex job field.

As soon as Art-o-Mat came to my attention and I realized that the profits it generates would have to be used for something, Dr. Smith and I decided that this was a fantastic opportunity to create a fund to help senior art majors. Currently, the fund is being set up to annually contribute to students in the Art and Architecture department. Whether that fund will be a merit-based award or go towards large-scale career events is still to be decided.

My professor and I also established one last aspect of the Art-o-Mat project. In addition to installing and maintaining an Art-o-Mat machine and using its funds to benefit art majors, we would also encourage art students to apply to become official Art-o-Mat artists and have their works distributed in machines around the country. This would give them an excellent opportunity to get their work viewed and to receive monetary support to continue creating pieces for the machines. In addition to having the machine revenue set aside for departmental career-related events, a portion of the funds will also go to purchasing prototype kits for art majors to use in preparing their submissions for the machine.

Overall, the UNC Charlotte Art-o-Mat project is still underway, but things are moving relatively quickly. We expect to have our very own machine officially installed in the near future, perhaps as early as next semester. If you’re ever on campus and have time to visit the Rowe Arts building, pop in and take some time to find the machine and get a souvenir to keep for yourself. After all, it not only supports Clark Whittington in his continual dedication to spread unique art in communities across America, but also supports independent artists, some of whom might just be from our very own art department.



(Left) Danielle Walden (second from right) stands with fellow Levine Scholars during the release of UNC Charlotte's Sanskrit Literary Arts Magazine.



(Right) The Art-O-Mat machine stands ready to deliver art on demand for eager art enthusiasts.

ARCHITECTURE AS A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

By Arik Miguel '21

From visiting architectural job sites in Japan, operating heavy machinery for non-profit projects, to tutoring students, Arik's hands-on experiences in the department of Architecture have allowed him to grow into a budding architect, ready to build the world.

Architecture is well known as a time consuming and work intensive major. Stories abound at every university about architecture students working through the night and drinking copious amounts of coffee, but this is simply because so many different facets of life fit into the study of architecture. UNC Charlotte is no exception, and in fact the architecture school prides itself on the variety of fields students can pursue in relation to architecture. Students are introduced to environmentally conscious architecture, urban planning, furniture design, computer-driven parametric design and a variety of styles of art among other topics. All these ideas intersect the field of architecture and create whole worlds of design ideas to explore. Over my four years at UNC Charlotte I have gotten the chance to explore many different ideas about architectural design, practice and history. I have, however, maintained a focus on the practice of humanitarian design.

Through a variety of opportunities with both the School of Architecture and LSP I have been able to intern at the non-profit formerly known as Urban Ministry in order to learn more about the issues of homelessness and affordable housing in Charlotte. I have gotten to be part of Freedom By Design (FBD), a community service oriented design-build student organization. Through FBD I was able to help create little free libraries for UNC Charlotte's campus and helped develop a nature trail for Nevins Inc, a non-profit that works with adults with



developmental disabilities.

The School of Architecture also runs a study abroad program in Tokyo, Japan every summer, and I was lucky enough to be able to go. Learning about new styles of architecture, new perspectives on urban design and a completely new culture in the largest city in the world with my academic peers was something I will never forget.

I will continue to study architecture at UNC Charlotte and will begin courses for the graduate program this summer and am set to graduate next spring with a Masters in Architecture. I am excited for the opportunity to continue learning with all the amazing students and faculty in the School of Architecture and for the chance to continue using my knowledge of architecture to provide humanitarian solutions to social issues in Charlotte.



AIM HIGH: LEVINE'S GOT YOU

By Natalie Bates '24

The opportunity to be involved in AFROTC through Detachment 592 here at UNC Charlotte has been one of intense personal growth and boundary pushing in an incredibly supportive environment. As someone who thrives on structure and discipline, the military began to seem a natural course of action for me as I began considering my path beyond the college experience. One of the foundational expectations in AFROTC is "Excellence In All We Do," and one of my favorite aspects of the program thus far is the unanimous community of support each and every cadet brings, individually, to accomplish this for the larger team. This commitment to and expectation of excellence for every cadet manifests as a lot of extra time and effort outside of official AFROTC designated times, but as Levine Scholars all learn on NOLS, there is no task too big to be broken down and handled in bite size pieces. As cliche as it may sound, community truly is key to success in every area of college, whether it be AFROTC, Levine, academics, or any other potential demand on your time. Having people to rely on who have your best interest at heart and want to see you succeed makes a world of difference in being able to balance the daily juggle of tasks, and I have found nothing but support from the Levine community, the AFROTC community, the BHP community, and my professors here at UNCC.

Even in the midst of COVID, I was given enough support to feel confident about getting involved in a variety of clubs and extracurriculars and even seek out a leadership position as a freshman in one of them. In terms of balancing the daily demands of AFROTC with my daily responsibilities, I have found personal accountability to be a close second to allowing myself to lean on the

support systems all these programs have built into their structure. 24 hours in a day is shockingly long without the rigidity of a highschool schedule, and it is actually quite attainable to have very productive days with the proper discipline. Anyone who knows me in the slightest here could tell you about my "grandma" sleep schedule and how I often say no to evening social events during the week, but with 06:00 physical training three times a week it is simply required when it comes to balancing normal college obligations and self care. Anyone here could also tell you about my strict designated alone time (a must as an introvert!) With lists of to-dos constantly whirling, taking time for self care is essential- it makes me way more productive in the long run.

Beyond my early bedtimes, being a cadet in Detachment 592 doesn't inhibit my ability to participate in normal college and academic activities in the slightest - it's actually encouraged! I see it as the best of both worlds: I get to be pushed both physically and mentally beyond my comfort zone of leadership in direct preparation for a job in the military, while simultaneously getting to experience all of the personal growth opportunities the Levine Program and UNC Charlotte as a whole offers.

Although it is a distinctly different environment than normal classes, the leadership, confidence, and integrity AFROTC cultivates really compliments what Levine and all extracurricular organizations seek students to grow into. Being surrounded by peers and faculty who encourage me and my goals both personally and professionally make each day manageable when it comes to prioritizing time and getting involved with everything Charlotte has to offer!



(Left) Natalie (front) stands at attention, ready for whatever comes next in the Air Force ROTC. (Center) Natalie (front left) stands with fellow Levine Scholars and the campus College Dream On 3 team (part of a local non-profit organization), helping a young person's sports dreams come true. (Right) Natalie and Detachment 592 with AFROTC are ready to conquer their daily PT before classes begin.

CO-OP, PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE



By Trenton Teague '23

I was beginning to get discouraged. I had applied for so many internships that I could turn out a personalized cover letter in minutes. I had resumes tailored for design internships, manufacturing internships, and internships that were in categories all their own. I had applied for internships and Co-ops from Charlotte to Puerto Rico, and no one was biting. I was beginning to worry that I would simply have to do a different summer experience, but I wanted to work. Then, I received an email with the tagline "Reminder: Stem Virtual Career Fair Tomorrow." While I was sceptical of a virtual career fair, I thought 'what did I have to lose?'. I went in with a t-minus one day's worth of prep but came out of the virtual career fair with an interview at Altec Industries.

As a Mechanical Engineering major, internships are encouraged. The pay is good and the real world experiences make the hard classes worth it. I was fortunate enough to do well in my interview and be offered a Product Intern Co-op with Altec Burnsville. A Co-op is a multi semester internship, which allows for extra training and more experience. Altec specializes in custom work trucks and pull behinds. According to my contact, I will be specializing in the work trucks, along with custom ladder racks. My Co-op will consist of three stages of work. For the first month or so, all the Co-op students will receive extensive training in Solidworks, a 3D design software, as well as a refresher on all the engineering calculations we will need to be a successful intern. For the second stage, I will be on the production floor learning how the designs are implemented, which will give me a better understanding when designing parts or sections. Finally, I will be in the Altec offices working with a team of other Co-op students and engineers to design or troubleshoot whatever projects they are working on. This could include boom crane trucks, wood chippers, custom storage bodies, or a number of other products. These products will then be used by companies around the country, meaning that some of my work could potentially make life easier or more convenient for workers that provide essential services such as linemen or construction workers. Due to the length of the Co-op, I will have lots of autonomy by December and will be working nearly unsupervised. This is very exciting as I will have real projects for my portfolio when looking for future jobs and can do work that will actually make it to the real world.

While the work for my Co-op is incredibly exciting, it is only the beginning. I will also be able to live in the mountains, minutes away from Mt. Mitchel. This is not only exciting because of the scenery and the hiking, but also because it is my first experience with living truly on my own. There are also many benefits that I did not previously consider. When I was talking to Carlos, a fellow Levine Scholar that completed a Co-op in his sophomore year, he summed it up perfectly:

"While taking a co-op so early on in one's college career is a little non-traditional, it was a very rewarding and educational experience. Going into my internship, I didn't quite understand what the day-to-day tasks of an engineer consisted of. Through this internship, I was able to shadow several engineers while simultaneously contributing to the company's goals. I was able to understand several aspects that I had not exposed to in school yet, and understand the application of the material I was being taught. Participating in the co-op so early on in my career was of extreme benefit to me financially, educationally, professionally, and personally. Financially, the co-op allowed me to work for the entirety of a semester which opened doors for opportunities for travel and removed financial dependency from my parents. Educationally, I understood the reason why I was being taught the material, understood the application side, and had a better knowledge of the technical jargon that engineers used. Professionally, I gained real technical experience shadowing engineers, conducting projects, and working in a real engineering setting."

On top of the reasons Carlos presents, a well performing Co-op student can often be offered a full time position or another internship upon graduation. This can be a huge leg up in the engineering industry, where even entry level positions prefer candidates with experiences. Thus, the Co-op will set me up for a successful completion of my degree and a successful career.

With luck, this Co-op will be the first real step towards a successful future. The professional connections and experience will help me throughout my career, and living alone will prepare me for life after college. Getting back to a small town atmosphere will help me finally decide if I want to live there or in a city. Overall, I think that the Co-Op will be a great experience and would recommend it, thus far, to anyone. Surprisingly, but not at all in a bad way, I would also recommend attending career fairs, both in person and virtual. Just do it with a little more prep work than I did.



From utilizing his Engineering skills on LSP's Alternative Spring Breaks, to exploring cities with fellow Levine's, and getting ready for his Co-op in Burnsville, North Carolina, Trenton has taken advantage of all the opportunities UNC Charlotte and the LSP have offered.

32,000 MILES AND COUNTING

By Robby Lankford '16

After graduating in the Spring of 2016 with a Bachelor's Degree in Civil and Environmental Engineering and a minor in Actuarial Mathematics, I returned to UNC Charlotte in the Autumn of 2016 to pursue a Master's Degree in Mathematical Finance. At the time, I was wanting to work as an Actuary. I had already passed the Society of Actuaries (SOA) Exam FM: Financial Mathematics and during my first semester of graduate school, I passed the SOA Exam P: Probability. Those two exams helped me to secure an Actuarial Internship at Liberty Mutual Insurance in Boston, MA in the Summer of 2017, working with their Global Reinsurance team. The experience I acquired and the people I met that summer started to shift my interests away from Actuarial Science and toward Statistics and Data Science; both somewhat a part of Actuarial Science, but applicable to more businesses than insurance. Additionally, after living in Boston for just a few short months, I knew that I wanted to live there long-term as soon as I could.

Returning to Charlotte for my final semester in the Autumn of 2017, I graduated from the Mathematical Finance program and took a job with Ally Financial in their Uptown Charlotte office. Having turned away from Actuarial Science, and holding an advanced degree in Mathematical Finance, I had been interviewing for several Quant roles, hoping to start out there and work my way into a Data Science position; however, I opted to take the position at Ally. This role was a good fit because it was on the Enterprise Analytics team where I could work directly with Data Scientists and where I had a better chance for quicker advancement.

I spent the first year building statistical models, optimizing internal procedures and developing reporting standards. Eventually I was promoted to a Data Scientist where I am now, among other responsibilities, in charge of modeling and forecasting several key processes and metrics across multiple lines of business. In November 2019, my job was transitioned to a remote position and I was finally able to move to Boston. With the "free time" that I found while working remotely, I decided to return to school in the Summer of 2020. I am currently enrolled at Penn State working on a Master's Degree in Applied Statistics.



Robby and Sarah celebrate his commencement from UNC Charlotte before beginning his career path in Applied Statistics.



When I reflect on my time in the Levine Scholars Program, I often think about the trips I was able to take through the program: the first to NOLS in 2012, the second to London in 2014 and the third to Stellenbosch, South Africa in 2015. I had never been one for traveling. There was a long period in my life where I was convinced that I would stay in my hometown forever, and I was just fine with that. In fact, going to Alaska for NOLS was the first time I had ever been on a plane, but at least I had my fellow scholars and Dr. Mike. Going to London was the second time I had ever flown, and it was both my first solo and my first international flight. Traveling for the LSP put me further out of my comfort zone than I had ever been, and profoundly impacted my development.

These trips were a catalyst for self-discovery and helped me realize that I had been putting unnecessary limitations on myself, preventing me from taking risks and reaching my full potential. As I began to consider what I wanted for myself in the future, I started exploring different career paths that better aligned with my changing interests. This exploration led from Engineering to Actuarial Science to Quantitative Finance to Data Science. Along the way, I learned how to take risks and be comfortable staying

Robby stands in the fields of Alaska on the inaugural NOLS Levine expedition, excitedly capturing all of the moments on the trek.

outside my comfort zone. I now live over 800 miles from where I grew up and have been away longer than I ever have in my life. I am working in a field that I did not know existed until a few years ago, and I would not have had the courage to take a chance on something outside my norm had the LSP not pushed me to do so many, many times. I reflect on my experiences in the LSP often and know they continue to shape me, especially when I face new or unknown challenges.

CONNECTING THE PAST TO THE PRESENT

By Bridgitt Ku '21

Having spent the majority of my formative years in suburban North Carolina, I always felt detached from my Chinese heritage. In our town, the only other Chinese families were the owners of Chinese restaurants. There were no Chinese associations, churches or language schools, and no one with whom to celebrate Chinese New Year. As a result, I never understood what it meant to be Chinese American. At home, I enjoyed traditional Taiwanese foods that my mother made, but at school, I packed spaghetti for lunch. I felt stuck between two worlds.

I didn't realize what I was missing until I visited the Museum of Chinese in America (MOCA) in New York City this past January during my junior year. The museum detailed the timeline of Chinese immigration to America, charting with painstaking detail brutal acts of violence against Chinese communities and every form of discrimination. In my high school textbooks, the most I ever learned about Chinese American history was from a singular sentence with the briefest mention of Chinese railroad workers or Angel Island. I was shocked by the content I witnessed at MOCA. Yet, I could track traces of that same persistent racism in my own childhood experiences when classmates would make fun of my looks or crack the same tired jokes steeped in stereotypes. The Museum of Chinese in America helped me to find a sense of solidarity and pride that I didn't know could exist.

When I came back from my visit, I immediately went to Dr. Smith, the LSP faculty fellow, to discuss how I could incorporate what I had learned into my civic engagement project. Originally, my idea was to create an on-campus exhibit displaying Chinese American history. However, Dr. Smith encouraged me to fill in the gap within available resources and to hone in on the local Chinese American population in Charlotte instead of the broader United States. When COVID-19 caused the future of on-campus events to be uncertain, we explored other avenues for my project and determined that a book would be the best medium to disseminate the information. In the fall semester of my senior year, I conducted an independent study under Dr. Smith's guidance to lay the groundwork for my project, reading scholarly resources on topics such as the creation of Chinatowns, the Chinese Exclusion Act, and the model minority myth. Through Dr. Smith's connections, I was able to virtually meet with scholars whose work shaped available literature on the Chinese American community, like Dr. Wei Li, who first coined the term "ethnoburb" in 1997. Now, I am currently in the process of interviewing local Chinese Americans to learn about their experiences living in Charlotte. In partnership with Atkins Library and Dr. Hanchett from HistorySouth, these interviews will be compiled in a book to highlight the stories of the Chinese American community in Charlotte while providing context of Chinese American history.

In all honesty, when I first embarked on this project, I wasn't sure that there was a large enough Chinese American population in Charlotte to create a meaningful project. But through my project, I have been able to connect with local Chinese American organizations and read articles from the Charlotte Observer on Chinese Americans from as far back as 1892! In a time when hate-filled attacks against the AAPI (Asian American and Pacific Islander) community are increasing, I feel an even stronger need to bring awareness to a community that is all too often excluded from public discourse and painted as perpetual foreigners. While I am disheartened whenever I read yet another news article about an anti-Asian hate crime, I am encouraged by conversations I have with Chinese American museums and organizations across the United States with the same goals as me, and whose excitement is palpable whenever I tell them about my project.

Conducting this project has also piqued my interest in learning about my own family history. Finishing my senior year in Taiwan, I have the rare opportunity to spend an extended amount of time with family members whom I haven't seen since I moved to the States at five years old. Hearing stories from my great-uncles about my great-grandfather fighting against the Communist Party in the Chinese Civil War, coupled with the work I am doing for my civic engagement project, has helped me to feel more connected with my Chinese heritage than ever before.

Bridgitt's work with Chinese Americans and Chinese culture through her civic engagement project, provides a space for these individuals voices, as well as Bridgitt's, to be recorded and heard.



FROM MENTEE TO MENTOR:

My Journey Through the LSP Mentorship Program

By Annie Sung '22

Being a part of the Levine Scholars Mentorship Program was something that I was eager and excited to participate in coming into college my freshman year. Having the chance to connect with upperclassmen with similar interests who had experienced what it was like to be in college and be a part of the Levine Program was invaluable to me. Coming into UNC Charlotte as an out of state freshman, I was both excited and worried about a wide variety of aspects of college and was eager to get the most out of my four years while I was there. Being paired with an upperclassman helped ease many of my concerns, strengthen my connection with the other cohorts of LSP, and guide me in the right direction in both my academic and personal life.

My freshman year, I was paired with Vidhya Balasubramanian, who was a senior at the time, and a great role model for me in many ways. That year, we went to food trucks in South End Charlotte, attended musicals, attended on-campus events, met up for coffee, and she even invited me to her annual Christmas party. Being able to connect with Vidhya, who had already had so much success through the Levine Scholarship Program, was eye opening for me to be able to witness all of the amazing things that are achievable through the program. We discussed common college struggles, what professors she thought I would enjoy, stresses in personal and family life, and all of the opportunities that she recommended I take advantage of in college. She even played a prominent role in my decision to travel to South Africa for a Study Abroad the summer after my freshman year!

Coming into my junior year, I really wanted to help develop that sense of inclusivity and community in LSP that I received through the Mentorship Program my freshman year, and so I joined the Mentorship Committee. Given this school year looking vastly different than any previous years, the Mentorship Program had to look different as well. Navigating ways in which we could connect freshmen with upperclassmen, in a safe, effective manner, no matter their location, was a feat in and of itself. We explored many ways in which we thought the Mentorship program could best function during this difficult time and decided upon a mixed format for individuals to take part in in-person mentorship activities or virtual activities, completely according to their personal preference. From there, the Mentorship Committee paired one freshman with two upperclassmen and, instead of primarily pairing based off similar academic interests, we decided to focus more on pairing based upon extracurricular interests, whether individuals wanted to connect with their group in-person or virtually, and how much time they had in their schedule to commit to being a part of the Mentorship Program.

One thing that the Mentor Program implemented my freshman year that I really enjoyed was a “BINGO” scorecard that contained recommended activities for me to take part in with my mentor. The activities like “Go explore uptown together” and “Share a meal off campus together” created lots of fun and lasting memories that allowed me to explore outside of my comfort zone. After bringing this idea to the Mentorship Committee, we decided to



Annie (middle) enjoys creating community with her Levine Scholar mentors, from attending speaker series to trying delicious food.

continue this format in this year's program.

In developing both an in-person and virtual version of the scorecards, I had to think outside-the-box for some of the activities that were listed on the cards. I

wanted to provide ideas of activities for mentorship groups that they may not have thought of doing on their own. Thinking of creative versions of events for the scorecard, especially the virtual scorecard, was a fun task, with activities ranging from “Paint or draw your mentor/mentee” to “Do a blindfolded baking challenge through Zoom”. In combination with the BINGO cards, we also set up a giveaway system in which mentorship groups would be awarded Levine clothing items and accessories if they ranked first, second, or third in most activity submissions within the given giveaway period.

Throughout the last few years in the Mentorship Program, I have gained a great amount from being a mentee my freshman year, to now being a mentor my junior year. I plan to continue to be a part of the Mentorship Program and Mentorship Committee going into my senior year of college and play my part in strengthening the ties between cohorts and individuals at different points in their personal lives and academic careers. The Mentorship Program is such a wonderful opportunity from which scholars can gain support, community, and lasting friendships and I am excited to continue to help grow the program into something that all Levine Scholars want to take part in!





FINDING JOY IN THE WORLD OUTSIDE

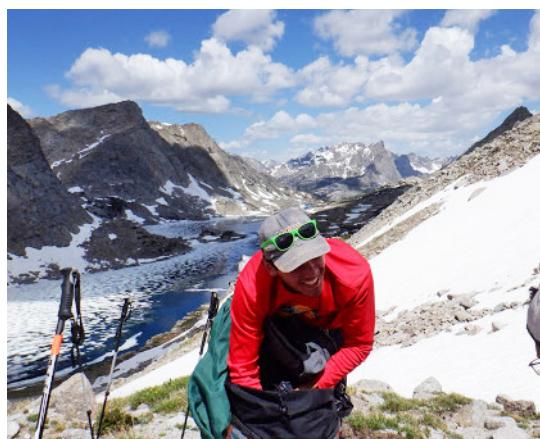
By Cameron Mercer '23

A major reason for this shift in perspective and understanding I attribute to the length of time we are at NOLS- a month is a very long time to be in the wilderness. It was both the longest and most remote trip I, or anyone else in my class had been on before starting here together at UNC Charlotte. Those days at NOLS were filled with the joy of childhood - campfires, survival skills, sunsets and sunrises of unrivaled beauty, an entire sky filled with the most breathtaking stars- stars we almost never see in cities so full of light all the time, the sound of rivers, the sight of glacier snow. I remember feeling the sense of childhood wonder and excitement, taking in every moment and always looking up; I realized how freeing it is to truly exist outside of the physical, social, and mental boxes we live in during our typical day-to-day lives. And I also realized how much more genuine people are when there is nothing to distract them from really interacting with each other.

Outside. Joy. Genuineness. People. NOLS helped ignite a realization of what I had always loved about the outdoors, and led me to search for a summer experience in which I could both work outside and also incorporate mentorship. This search led to an opportunity at Camp Laurel South in Maine, where I will be working as a camp counselor, and I am stoked! Specifically, I'll be an adventure counselor at Camp Laurel South which means I will be taking the kids I'm working with on camping trips, hiking trips, through ropes courses, and on climbing towers. Two years after my NOLS course, I am so excited for the role of instructor and student to be flipped, and to be the one who shares my love of the outdoors with the student's I'm working with. I'm very excited to see how this experience will continue to change my perception of the outdoors. Whether it will put a damper on my feeling of freedom when I am outside because I'll have responsibilities for others, or if my love of being outside will continue to grow through seeing the excitement of the people around me. I have a strong suspicion that it will be the latter. Joy after all, is highly contagious.

Ever since I was a little kid, I've spent a lot of my time outdoors, running, playing sports, working to earn the ranks from Cub Scout to an Eagle Scout, you name it, if it was outside I was there. Some of my earliest memories are from being outside, in particular, memories of me, my sisters, and my cousins on my grandfather's farm come to mind. We would go on tractor rides and "help" him plant the season's crops and then return to help with the harvest. I think we might have eaten half of each haul of fresh treasures we picked before we ever got back to the barn, if you've never eaten a black raspberry right off the bush, I highly suggest it. These are the memories that I cherish so much, looking back on them now these moments are forever ingrained in my mind; the sound of grandpa's tractor starting up, the warming touch of playing on the swinging gate, the itch of sitting on haybales, and a smile that was always present and so authentic from being in the great outdoors. Being outside was always a place of joy, laughter, and fun- even if I lost a game of pickup ball or missed the winning goal in soccer- there was always something in being in the great outdoors that brought me joy.

As much as I loved the outdoors, and thought I knew all of what nature had to offer, my perspective of the outdoors completely changed after I went on NOLS, as I am sure every scholar's does.



Cameron shares his love for the outdoors with fellow Levine Scholars, from NOLS to weekend adventures, and treks through parts of the Appalachian Trail.

FINDING MY WAY AS A MUSLIM WOMAN

By Yara Mahmoud '22

I think the first time I realized that my college experience might progress differently was when I first spoke to my advisor. I remember her looking at me at the end of the meeting and telling me, "I want you to be honest with me. Do you think that this career path is fitting for someone like you?" Normally, I wouldn't have let a comment like that bother me. But it was clear to me that she had an underlying meaning behind it, and I knew she didn't think that a Muslim woman like me should be pursuing a nursing degree. I remember smiling at her and replying, "I don't see myself doing anything else." From that moment on, I told myself that I wouldn't allow anyone to set me back or hinder my experience at UNC Charlotte.

Everyone knows that it is a critical time during your senior year of high school to start deciding where you would like to go to college and sending in your applications. It is also an important time for scholarship applications. When I was sending in scholarship applications, I had so many of my high school teachers doubting my ability to receive any scholarships. I was up against multiple other students from my predominantly white school, and they believed that I was no competition. After receiving not one, not two, but three scholarship offers for my undergraduate studies, instead of congratulating me, my teachers told me that my success with those scholarships was only due to the colleges' need to "meet a quota". If I'm being honest with myself, that seed of thought that they imbedded in me grew into an ugly flower when I started my first year of school as a Levine Scholar at UNC Charlotte.



However, I quickly began to realize that my life in college was going to be nothing like the experience I had in high school. In high school, it was almost instinctual to suppress any evidence of culture in my day-to-day life. But in college, the people around me gave me no reason to feel any less than them, and that is something that I am still thankful for to this very day. As a member of a cohort of twenty in the Levine Scholars Program at UNC Charlotte, I was able to form bonds of friendship with my peers, and with that, a sense of community that I had never experienced before. The upperclassmen Levine scholars were actually the ones who encouraged me to attend UNC Charlotte's club fair, and from that, I broadened my friendships through my involvement in the Muslim Student Association (MSA). This was my first time ever being in a Muslim-centered group, and the people I have come to call my friends have been nothing but encouraging in my social and academic endeavors.

Although I have another year left in my college career, I believe that I have made a name for myself in the classes I've taken, the activities I've been involved in, and the friendships that I've created. I even have my picture up in the UREC building! I hope that my experience in college so far will inspire other Muslim girls to pursue whatever they choose when attending UNC Charlotte. Although there might be obstacles in their path, in the beginning, I hope they come to know that those obstacles are merely temporary.



(Top) Yara (left) has found her place at UNC Charlotte, embracing her identity as a Muslim woman, from Nursing to Campus Involvement and within the Levine Scholars program.



FARM TO TABLE

FARM TO PANTRY: LESSONS IN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

By Andrea Badillo-Perez '21

As I interviewed patients at Biddle Point, a low-income clinic for uninsured and underinsured individuals, the 16% of Mecklenburg County residents that suffer from food insecurity became more than just a number. I documented their struggles through the evaluation of a Food Pharmacy Initiative. After screening patients to identify their food-related needs, I helped provide an emergency 2-day supply of healthy foods, connected individuals to long-term resources, and conducted interviews to gauge the project's impact. I notably found that there was a need for fresh produce instead of canned goods. The promise and opportunity of civic engagement in the Levine Scholars Program allowed me to transform that research-based need into action.

With the use of the resources and guidance that the LSP provided me, I was able to create a partnership between the low-income clinic and a local church right down the street that was looking for new opportunities to serve the surrounding community. Upon a consistent and shared dialogue about the goal of this collaboration, the idea of implementing a fresh food pantry in the church was created. However, some obstacles presented themselves as we worked towards this goal, including the need for handicap accessibility in the space that the church wanted to use for the pantry. While I was initially disillusioned in my original plans, it ultimately served as an opportunity to expand our original intentions and think more creatively: an immediate response and a subsequent three-part project that will address the needs of this community in an even broader manner.

The immediate response included the establishment of a mobile fresh food pantry through the use of an Atrium Health van that sits at the church every Friday. Now, a 3-minute walk to the church and a referral from the clinic can help alleviate the struggle that food insecure patients face in this underserved community. Additionally, we decided to reimagine the original plan into a more comprehensive resource hub, now called The Healing Hub. This space will contain computer labs, meeting rooms, workspaces, and other resources to encourage community cohesion, collaboration, and social/economic mobility within this neighborhood. The first part of our reimagined project is currently underway and includes a talk series with community speakers on relevant health information and the utilization of this new space within the church. The second part of the project will be the development of furniture and equipment necessary to finalize the physical space and resources of the hub, and the third phase will be implemented by another Levine Scholar, Madison Snyder, and will include the eventual establishment of the permanent, full service food pantry.

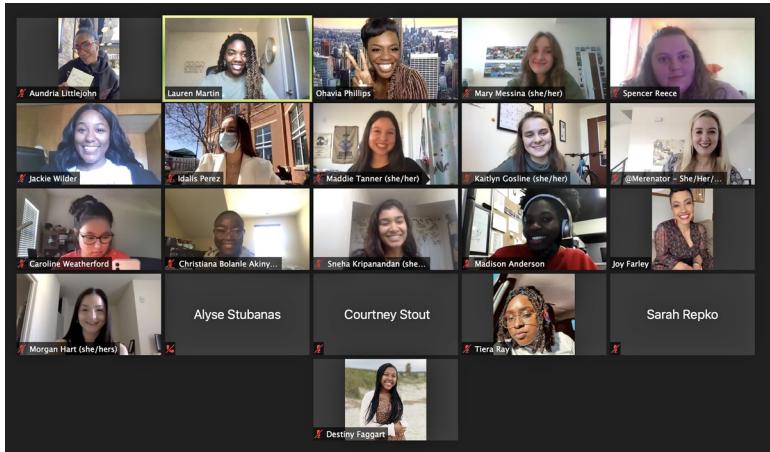
With lessons learned about being flexible, innovative, and determined, I am grateful for the experience that civic engagement in this program has taught me. I am grateful for the impact it is making and will continue to make in the health and wellness of this community, a sentiment I will cherish and take with me upon graduating in May.



Andrea's love of Charlotte merged with her desire to impact her community through civic engagement; working with community partners such as Atrium Health and local Pastor's to establish The Healing Hub.

The Power of Sowing a Seed: MY PATH TO BECOMING A NEWMAN CIVIC FELLOW

By Lauren Martin '22



(Right) Lauren Martin (fourth from the left) works with fellow community leaders as she navigates managing her own non-profit and continuing to impact the UNC Charlotte campus and surrounding community.

Imagine if you could look into a crystal ball that told you exactly what the future held for you. Life would be so much easier if it actually worked like that. You would not have to guess if you were choosing the right college or picking the correct major or even what to eat for dinner. Well, unfortunately there is no such thing, but I want to let you know that things have a way of working themselves out.

On March 2, 2021, I was notified that I was selected to be a 2021-2022 Newman Civic Fellow because of my exceptional leadership on UNC Charlotte's campus and in my community. I was elated and honored to be chosen for this prestigious fellowship, but to be honest, my road to the fellowship was not always easy and there were times when I wanted to give up.

Let's take a trip down memory lane.

At age 14, I spent my entire summer volunteering at "I Am Complete", a Christian, all-girls summer camp. During this time, I fell in love with the idea of being involved in the community and "sowing a seed" in others' lives.

At age 15, I established a chapter of Girl Up at my high school. Girl Up is an initiative created by the United Nations Foundation to advance girls' skills, rights, and opportunities to be leaders. Being the President of HRHS Girl Up allowed me to develop my leadership skills and find my voice while speaking up for the most vulnerable.

At age 16, I loved what I was able to accomplish through HRHS Girl Up but felt there was still a large need not being met in my community,

hence Harrisburg Girl Talk was born. Through Harrisburg Girl Talk, I was able to mentor middle school girls through bi-weekly meetings and community service events. This experience ignited a spark within me to mentor girls and to provide them the mentorship I wish I had received from my community growing up.

At age 19, I was fortunate to have an internship with EmpowHERment, Inc, a local nonprofit that empowers girls and women to be leaders in their own communities. Through this experience, I discovered my longing to permanently be a part of an organization that was bigger than myself.

At age 20, I established my own nonprofit, called Wear Your Crown. Our mission is to create a safe space for women to be uplifted, inspired, and loved by other strong women. Leading a nonprofit has taught me the true meaning of being a leader and perseverance.

In the present day, receiving this fellowship means the world to me! It means that all those times I had self-doubt, I was right to continue and strive to set an example for others. It means that the work I am doing matters and that it is truly making a difference. It means that I now have a stronger network and more tools at my disposal to change the world for the better. It means that I have a bigger responsibility to speak up for those who are not heard.

I am proud to have been chosen as a Newman Civic Fellow because my story is uniquely my own. Upon reflection, I realized that it is not about curing cancer, solving climate change, or eliminating all hate, but taking one step at a time to accomplish something larger than oneself.

BEING A TA *in the ERA of* ZOOM

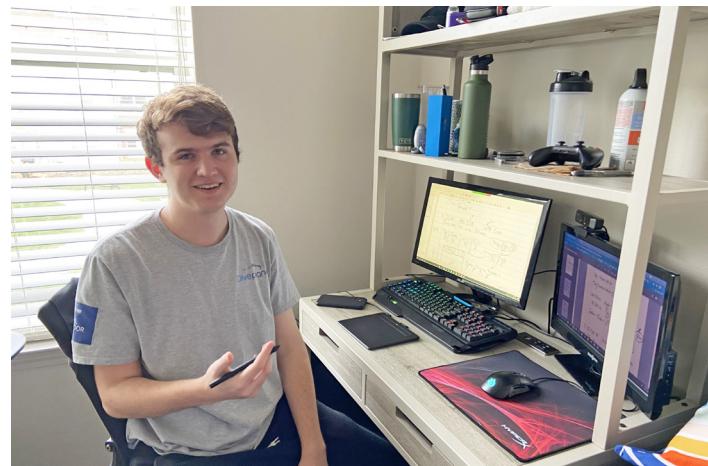
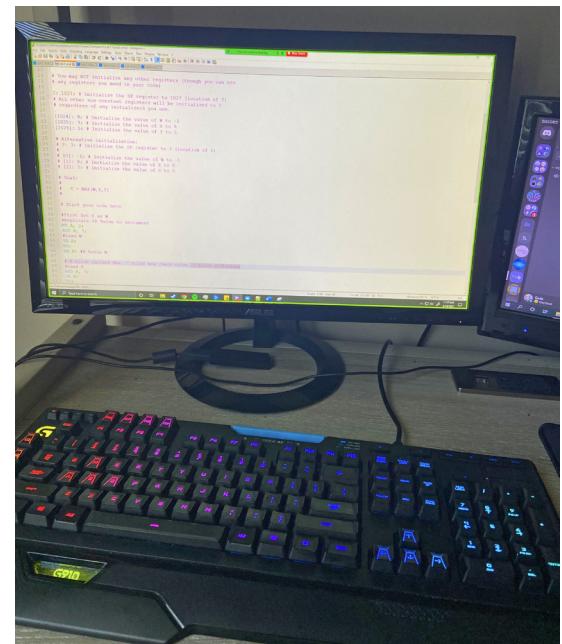
By Cade Mack '22

“Would you be interested in being a TA for this course?” was the message I received from a TA in my computer architecture course near the end of the Fall 2020 semester. At the time I had no prospective employment options in my near future; despite working various jobs in previous semesters, the dramatic changes resulting from a global pandemic resulted in many of those opportunities no longer being available. . For this reason, I quickly responded to the TA, “Yeah! I’d be very interested.” As you would expect, this is how I became a TA in a virtual semester, but I would like to share my experiences as a TA so others can get a glimpse of what the job is like.

Firstly, I should explain that I am a lab TA. This means that I am only responsible for things that happen in and relating to the labs, so I do not do anything relating to the core lecture of the course. Most of my work comes in the form of hopping around breakout rooms during the lab and asking for any questions, but the other considerable portion is just from grading the labs of the students in my section. While grading can be a bit tedious, helping students during the labs has always been a rewarding experience for me! Not only, do I help people, but I also discuss and teach ideas that I am genuinely interested in, which also helps me learn topics on a deeper level. For example, there are some topics that I understood enough to test on while I took the class, but it was not until working as a TA that I developed a holistic understanding of these ideas. Teaching has always been something that I have enjoyed whether it be in the form of tutoring, mentoring, group work, and now being a TA.

Luckily, there are many more benefits to being a TA other than getting paid. Personally, I have been able to build relationships with not just the professor of the course, but also with the other TA’s! Of course, building relationships with faculty is priceless for any student because of things like recommendation letters, but I think we often underestimate how much we can learn just from interacting with the faculty of our intended fields of study. I have really appreciated hearing some of the wisdom and points of view that our professor has shared with us in weekly meetings or while discussing important decisions for the class. Building these relationships with professors also opens opportunities for research, which is a common objective for Levine scholars.

Unfortunately, my job has not always been building great relationships and helping grateful students. The job can be quite a bit of work sometimes. Personally, on lab days I must be logged into Zoom sessions for a little over six hours across the course of the day. Most of this time is spent with me periodically switching to a new breakout room and asking some new variation of the phrase: “Hey, how is everyone doing with the lab? Are there any questions?” A decent proportion of these attempts are met with no response because either the students



Cade Mack gives readers a glimpse of what life is like as a TA in a virtual environment. From answering questions, to grading, and helping students navigate difficult concepts and topics in Computer Science, Cade is always eager for a chance to help his peers.

have no questions, or they are not at their computers. This can grow a bit tiresome, but the times when someone unmutes and asks for help is refreshing. Being able to explain something to a student and watching them understand it afterwards is definitely energizing. Also, grading can be lots of work depending on the types of assignments. Most of the time it takes several hours to grade the assignments for my whole section, but this is just part of the job.

All in all, being a TA has been a rewarding journey through the relationships I have built with my fellow TA’s, my professor, and even some of my students! It is easy to see why so many other Levine Scholars have also chosen to work as TA’s. I have been able to improve my skills as both a computer scientist and as a teacher to others. To top it all off, I also get paid! Hopefully, this gives a proper glimpse into the TA life for anyone who is considering this type of position.

FROM GRADUATION TO NAVIGATING THE WORKFORCE

By Danielle Miller '19



After graduating from UNC Charlotte in 2019, I moved to Columbia, South Carolina to begin my career as a broadcast meteorologist at the local CBS station. The first few months involved hurricane coverage, school visits, community outreach, tracking severe weather, and visiting locations devastated by tornadoes and other damaging weather. I was certainly living my dreams and everything that I had prepared for during my time in undergrad! However, just eight short months into this position, the Coronavirus pandemic changed everything.

My normal work flow transitioned from a large studio space filled with coworkers to my 500 square foot apartment. In person school visits became zoom calls with students. Reporting also transitioned from going out into the community to staying isolated and telling people's stories from home.

While the transition to work from home was unanticipated, it certainly allowed me to think outside the box and get creative. Doing weathercasts from home was a new challenge and helped me learn a lot about technology. I was able to continue outreach to local students who were also now living and working from home by producing a series of science lessons and experiments. These experiments could easily be done from home and explained important weather and science concepts in the process. Work from home also wasn't too lonely with my newly adopted dog and with frequent video calls with coworkers and friends.

These relationships with my friends are certainly one of my biggest takeaways from my time at UNC Charlotte and within the Levine Scholars Program. What better way is there to form a lasting friendship than spending 25 days in the mountains with them? NOLS was the biggest bucket list item that I never knew I had on my list until I joined LSP. From the mountains of Wyoming, we transferred these friendships to dorm room living, raising money for Levine Children's Hospital via Dance Marathon, playing intramural sports with Special Olympics College, exploring Charlotte, and to now visiting each other in our new homes post-grad.

From creating community and lasting friendships within the LSP to achieving her career goals of being a meteorologist, Danielle reflects on her time in the LSP and beyond.

I also cherish, especially in a covid world, the opportunities to travel that were afforded to me during my four years in undergrad. I spent a semester in Lyon, France strengthening my French language and exploring all that Europe had to offer. From there I jumped over to Shanghai, China with the Levine Scholars Program to learn about an entirely different culture and global cities. I was also able to travel and learn across the United States, attending research conferences and making connections that would be vital post-graduation.

As a Levine alum, it has been so fun to watch subsequent classes grow and see everything they accomplish. It is easy to stay in touch and continue to support the program during finalist weekend events, alumni panels, and now with the formation of the Levine Alumni Council. Though travel is a bit stifled now, it is nice to know that there is a network of current and past scholars across the US and the world that are ready to welcome you and support you in your journey. Recently, I transferred back to my home state of Pennsylvania to continue working as a meteorologist and live a bit closer to my family. I am looking forward to Levine reunions to come and helping to welcome even more scholars into this amazing program.

SEEING THE Student Social in a BRAND NEW WAY

By Elise Lyght '21

One of my absolute favorite parts of the LSP Finalists' Weekend has to be the Student Social. It's a time where scholars from every cohort and finalists can come together after a long weekend of networking, informational panels about the program, and intensive interviews to do one thing: have fun. Through playing quirky games and team-building activities (as well as enjoying a pretty delicious catered dinner), the Social is the perfect opportunity for finalists to get to know current scholars, and gives scholars a chance to catch a glimpse of the incoming freshmen class.

Cut to Finalists' Weekend 2021, where an exciting, full evening of in-person socializing had to be condensed down to a 90 minute Zoom call. Of course, I was devastated at not being able to attend my last Student Social in person. However, being asked to assist in planning the Student Social renewed my excitement!

Revamping the Social took considerable creative thinking. I've been involved in planning the Student Social previously, but this year was entirely different. Over the course of the three months leading up to Finalists' Weekend, myself and three other scholars met regularly to reimagine typical Social games and activities so that everyone could still participate from their respective locations. Being virtual required that we forgo some of my personal favorite games, like "Ships and Sailors" or "Blindfold Drawing," since they typically require lots of space to move around or supplies. But, through stretching our "creative muscles," our team managed to design a Zoom call filled with reworked classics, such as "Ultimate Rock, Paper, Scissors" and "Scavenger Hunt," as well as add a few new additions to the roster! It was actually pretty amazing watching the Social take on such a new form.

The day of the Student Social, I remember being a bundle of nerves. Is this actually going to go as well as we planned? I thought to myself in a panic about twenty minutes before I was scheduled to start the call. Was including this game a mistake? Will people actually enjoy all of this? With quaking hands and shaky breath, at 4:15 I logged onto Zoom, gearing up for the most unpredictable Student Social I would ever attend.

But by 5:45, I was heartbroken that our Virtual Social was coming to an end. Over the hour-and-a-half scholars and finalists were together, I watched them work in teams to coordinate a hypothetical "desert island" survival kit, run around their rooms trying to find items on the "Scavenger Hunt" list, and cheer one another on during a gripping game of Virtual Rock, Paper, Scissors. Seeing their enthusiastic (and often hilarious) comments in the Zoom chat continuously put me at ease. I caught one comment that read "This is the best Zoom I've ever been on" as I watched everyone wave goodbye before the call ended, and I couldn't help but dance around my apartment kitchen with relief! We'd done it; the first ever Virtual Student Social had gone down in LSP history books as a success.

I'm still so proud that the Virtual Social went so well. One thing I really loved about the planning and execution of the social was that the virtual format provided us with new avenues to heavily involve



Elise has come to love and call UNC Charlotte her home over the past four years, and she hopes to pass on that enthusiasm to prospective Levine Scholar's and UNC Charlotte students through the LSP's Finalist Program and Student Social, even in a remote format.



scholars this year, especially freshmen who were still learning the ropes of being in the program. The Zoom call couldn't have run as smoothly without additional support from scholars who offered to learn the games and activities in advance, and create opportunities for personal conversations by facilitating breakout rooms throughout the entirety of our 90 minutes together. They were truly stellar, and added the enthusiastic energy needed to make the call fantastic. But, I don't think we need to leave behind in-person Student Socials entirely.

The opportunities for better understanding and building connections with finalists are so much greater when we're able to have fun together. The incoming freshman class didn't receive the full-on Student Social that I would've loved for them to have, but that only excites me for the day they can attend it in-person as inducted Levines. And I hope that they'll throw themselves into "Ultimate Rock, Paper, Scissors" just as, if not more, enthusiastically!



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.