

A Few Words on a Page

By Jacob Huffman '14

I will start with a story.

Years ago I found a book on a shelf in the suburban, South Charlotte home in which I was born and raised. It was a family tree made of trees. It weighs about 11.6 pounds, bound in some sort of textured, green hardback with "The Huffmans" embossed in gold ink on the cover, and the roses from my grandmother's funeral pressed on the page that notes her birth. For years it sat on a forgotten shelf, unread, above my dad's 80s jazz CDs I once alphabetized for \$2, until I pulled it down one afternoon. The introduction is an essay of four brothers who migrated to the United States from Germany in 1756. For your reference, Mozart was rockin' it in Europe, and the Seven Years' War was in full swing. These brothers landed in Philadelphia and made their way to where the Huffmans live today. It is the story of my family's passing through the Appalachians until they ended up in North Carolina. It is the story of a couple hundred years of homesteading, pointless deaths and endless births. My own birth is mentioned about 12 pages from the end.

My mom and dad grew up with sharecropping and lumbering as the only viable sources of income in their hometowns. I grew up a world away from this. My folks left the farm, sought out a university education and raised their son and daughter in a city where they might find work outside of the noble, yet harder than anything vocations available back home. I may be wrong, but that is how I see it.

Since graduating from UNC Charlotte, I have been in national service with AmeriCorps. I started my work with Habitat for Humanity in Charlotte. In my service with Habitat, I worked with an army of AmeriCorps Crew Leaders, Habitat staff and volunteers to build safe, decent and affordable homes in underserved neighborhoods. I have continued service work with FoodCorps, a national network of AmeriCorps leaders invested in food, nutrition and agriculture education. We engage students and organize communities in school gardens, provide access to fresh food and knowledge about the operation of, and injustices inherent within, our food system today.

In ways I feel I am returning to a way of life my folks might have preferred to leave behind. I may be wrong, but as much as they support me, sometimes I think they chuckle about it. Purely from an appreciation for irony I inherited, as much as I inherited the dog-headed stubbornness of millworkers and farmers, from them. When we disagree, I like to remind them that they only have the family to blame. But my youthful rebellion is strongly bent by a



Jacob frames a house during a Habitat for Humanity Build-a-Thon in New Orleans

sincere intent to discover a true connection with my own culture, and the histories of those with whom and for whom I serve. Right now I am focused on understanding why it is that injustice exists and persists in my community, to understand what my place is in the liberation of marginalized people in this city and this country, establishing a personal framework to operate as a change agent for equality and access to opportunity, and to dismantle systematic oppression. At this my folks have never cracked a smile.

The support I feel from my family, directly from my living kin and from the ones who called this place home a hundred years ago, is something not shared by all the folks with whom I serve. I have had students who do not know their birthday and just guess at their age, and worked with families on jobsites whose closest relatives are across a country and an ocean and then some. In coming to know my roots, and hearing the stories of others, I am learning to see the shared meaning we give to places and spaces in this city that we all call home. In geography, my university praxis, this is called place making. Together through shared experience, determined by society, economy and environment, individuals and groups ascribe their locale with ethereal ideas embodied in the physical world around them - a floral wreath highway-side or two sets of initials

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in a heart carved in a tree. Death and love are ideas we manifest in this way.

In my work with AmeriCorps, growth and life have been consistent themes. New homes I have built with homeowners, homes that will be visited by grandchildren, as the homes in the mountain coves and coastal pinelands of my family I visited as a boy. Gardens where our youth discover self-empowerment, pride in their cultures and the importance of good food. The place I am making in this life, in this community is shared through these themes and these spaces, in ways that could fill a book of at least 11.6 pounds...probably more.

I have no intent of diverging from the path I have started down. I love what I do, I believe in what I do and I am willing to go to a lot of trouble to do it. Since the end of the Seven Years' War and the reign of Mozart, the Huffmans have been raising hell and tending to the land and people in this country without apology. That lineage is mine. I claim it and am proud of it. I have entwined myself in the fate of this community, and I have a lot left to learn here. I was born into the world like a brief afterthought in a green book on some shelf in South Charlotte.

I will end with a story.



Jacob spends time with local children during a Habitat for Humanity build in El Salvador

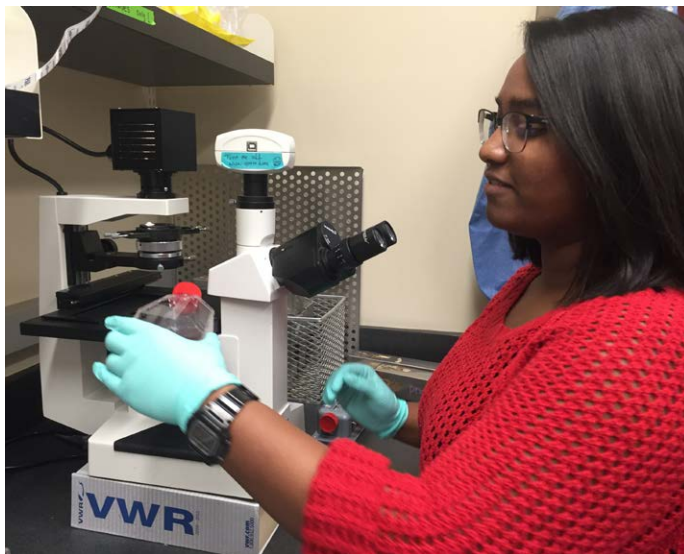
WHERE CURIOSITY LEADS

By Erica Cherian '19

Since my days of Science Olympiad in elementary school, science and the pursuit of scientific understanding have always inspired curiosity in me. If you have ever been forced to listen to me discuss scientific ideas that are presently being perceived as opinions, such as vaccination or climate change, then you know that they incite a great deal of passion in me. So it should come as no surprise that I elected to pursue a double major in biology and psychology, preparing for a career in medicine.

In all honesty, it has been getting more difficult to rouse that passion and curiosity for the mandatory classes taken as part of the major requirements; those classes with hundreds of students and professors who are tired of being asked "is this going to be on the test?" In light of that, I decided to pursue research on campus to gain a better understanding of the scientific process and to revitalize my passion. After looking into the many on-campus biology labs, I approached my advisor, who contacted some of the people with whom I was interested in working. To my surprise, the widely respected Dr. Pinku Mukherjee, known for her work in immunotherapy at the Mayo Clinic, responded and said that she would like to talk about my working in her lab.

After meeting her and her team, I began going to the lab on a daily basis to gain more knowledge about the procedures and the science behind the conclusions that are drawn. I enjoy the environment and everything I am doing. Currently, I am working on a project that involves modifying T-cells to target the MUC1 tumor antigen. I am also learning the techniques and basics that have to be in



Erica is working on modifying T-cells to target the MUC1 tumor antigen in Dr. Pinku Mukherjee's lab

place for research to be conducted, and I hope that I will eventually be able to contribute to our understanding of fighting such a devastating disease. Being a part of the process is so rewarding, and I hope that I will someday use these discoveries to treat patients.

Finding the RIGHT Tools for YOUNG Scientists

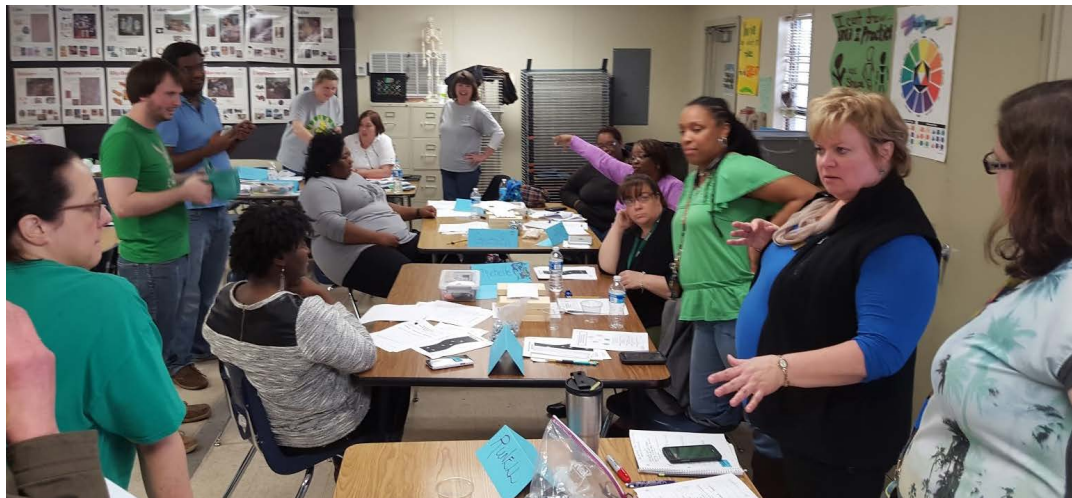
By Katie Waldroup '16

The brainstorming for this project began my sophomore year. I had just finished an education course that provided a semester-long clinical placement at Oakdale Elementary School in West Charlotte. I fell in love with the students there, and the classroom teacher with whom I worked was very supportive of my journey to becoming an educator. In my class on campus, we discussed what it meant to be classified as a Title I school – at least 40% of its students must come from families experiencing poverty – and what the Title I label does for the students in that school.

Those schools receive extra funding for explicit purposes such as books and interactive whiteboards. In our class we also discussed the value of integrating reading and math instruction with other useful subjects, such as science, to give students a more authentic learning experience and to better prepare them for their lives ahead. I wondered what would happen if we gave the teachers in the school some extra resources for teaching science, so I decided to investigate. Would it be a burden for the teachers who already work hard every day to teach their students reading and writing to add science into the mix, or would it be a useful aid in their classroom instruction?

Somehow, I convinced two other Levine Scholars, Robby Lankford '16 and James Budday '16, to join the investigation. I knew a little bit about education; they knew a lot about science and technology. To begin, I contacted the professor who arranged my clinical experience at Oakdale. She thought it would be a good idea to collaborate with the school directly, so she sent us to an administrator at the school who was already working to boost science instruction in the classrooms. She welcomed our ideas, showed us around the school and took us to a science lab that each class visited once a week. We decided to send out a needs assessment to the teachers to find out how they felt about teaching science and about the amount of technology available to them and their students. From the results we received, it seemed like an appropriate time to write a civic engagement grant to bolster their science resources.

Then came the hard part – or rather, the unexpected part. We had severely underestimated the time it takes to sift through the various levels of bureaucracy. Encountering road blocks and waiting on emails brought back memories of hiking through the Alaskan wilderness with its uneven terrain and unpredictable weather. Sometimes we had to scrap our old ideas and come up



The professional development session at Oakdale Elementary

with entirely new ones. We worked and re-worked our budgets by pricing things from various companies and stores, and we had to check and re-check which vendors would work with our grant process. We sifted through possible resources until we settled on a specific set of engineering kits. Each kit includes a teacher manual, a storybook that connects the specific topic (such as building a bridge or making a windmill) to real life, and many materials that allow the students to participate in a hands-on exploration of the concepts. Then, we worked our networks on campus to arrange a professional development session for the teachers at Oakdale to give them a chance to use the kits and integrate them into their classrooms.

Finally, we attended the professional development session for the teachers. We joined the teachers for part of the session, and I was able to work with them as they experimented with various types of bridges to see which held the biggest load without failing. The teachers were eager to participate and became rather competitive when it came to building the strongest bridge. I could not help but smile when I looked around the room and saw so many happy faces.

As a future educator, participating in this grant project taught me the value of both adequate classroom resources and knowledge of how to use them with students. It also showed me how difficult it is to get both of these things together for a group of teachers in a school and how rewarding it can be when everything finally comes together. It is important for elementary school students to learn reading and math, but it is vital that they learn skills that will teach them to think critically, communicate, problem-solve and make real-world connections. Now that I see how these skills benefit students long after they earn a diploma, I am excited to provide this instruction in my own classroom.

Studying Abroad “Once” Was Not Enough

By Caroline Fowle '17



Caroline spent 10 days hiking through Mt. Fitz Roy in Argentinian Patagonia

I have just finished “once” with my host family. “Once” as you will recall from the first day of your elementary Spanish class, means eleven. However, in Chile it means teatime. The explanation I was given for the name is that centuries ago in Chile miners snuck off to drink liquor (aguardiente) in the late afternoon during their workday. The workers disguised their ritual by simply referring to the eleven-lettered drink as “once.” Today, a late afternoon tea with bread and jam plays a huge role in Chilean culture. Even in the busy and modern capital city of Santiago, where I am studying this semester, many families consider la once to be an essential part of their day.

Immersed in a new language and culture, seeing how people structure and fill their day is one of my favorite things about living in another country. When I studied in China, I started my day with school-wide mandatory exercises on the main lawn and danced



Chile's carmenere wine grapes

with old Chinese women in the streets at sunset. When I studied in Spain, I returned home for lunch at around 2 p.m., socially and lazily passing time during siesta until shops opened back up. I love taking a step back from my American college student routine to see how people across the world spend the same 24 hours we each have in a day.

It is strange how normal my daily life in Chile feels. I think it is due, in part, to my slightly improved Spanish. Being able to further express myself in this language has allowed me to make Chilean friends, enjoy spending time with my incredible host mom and

sister, dive more into my coursework and even intern at a colonial art museum in downtown Santiago.

Beyond the language, Chile's incredibly diverse geography has encouraged me to tie up my old National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) boots and return to the backcountry. I spent 10 days backpacking through Patagonia. There, I watched the sunrise on Mt. Fitz Roy, marveled at a rainbow forming over a glacier and stood under the shadow of a condor's wings as it flew above me.

Although my trips to explore Chile's beaches, deserts and mountains are truly once-in-a-lifetime opportunities, I believe the image that will outlast all others of my semester here will be one of sitting around the table with friends and family, pouring another cup of tea and enjoying la once.

BRAVE in the ATTEMPT

By Eddie Angelbello '19



Tyler (third from left) and Eddie (center) pose with Special Olympics North Carolina Champions

Sports are all about overcoming obstacles, and before I started interning with Special Olympics, I thought that playing baseball for my entire life had surely drilled this idea into my head. You strike out, you strike out again, you strike out some more, and then you finally get a hit. You fall and you fall again, but you get back up and keep going. I thought I had it down, but I see now that there are far greater obstacles to overcome than those that lie within a sport. This is the reason that Special Olympics athletes are among the most courageous people in the world.

“Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me be brave in my attempt.”

This is the Special Olympics motto that drives all of the athletes to compete no matter what challenges they face. I was first introduced to this motto after deciding to apply for an internship with my fellow Levine Scholar, Tyler Rapp '19. Tyler and I both have a passion for helping those with special needs, and we were excited about participating in this new program called Special Olympics Project Unify Champions, which pairs college students with high school Project Unify clubs in order to build up each school's program and forge a stronger connection between different clubs. The program is starting in the greater Charlotte area this year, and we hope to expand the new internship idea to other regions.

Project Unify is a strategy and a movement within Special Olympics intended to create a more accepting environment for athletes with special needs by having them play with and against

students without intellectual disabilities. This approach is a way for athletes to feel that they are a part of something bigger and that Special Olympics is not only done for them, but also done with them. Unified Sports, however, does not aim to make athletes with intellectual disabilities think they are the same as everyone else. It is nothing but the truth – people with special needs are different from you and me, but they are in no way less. And when they step onto the field and out into life, the only difference I see is that they have the courage to overcome an obstacle much bigger than I can imagine.

Entering my freshman year at UNC Charlotte, I was excited to learn new things in all of my classes, but little did I know the most important lesson I would learn would come from outside the classroom. My professors have taught me some amazing things this year, but all of the people I have met through this internship with Special Olympics have taught me something that will help me overcome the obstacles that will come flying my way for the next three years and for the rest of my life. They have taught me the same lesson that Special Olympics athletes champion so well – to always be brave in my attempt.

I went into this internship hoping I could make a difference, but I did not know how much of a difference it would make in my life. I have worked with Tyler and our fellow interns to strengthen Project Unify by organizing events and fostering better communication, and I can only hope that we have made as much of a difference for Special Olympics as it has made for us.

Another Bite Out of the Apple

By Jaden Barney '17



In a line of unforeseen circumstances that last year's me would have found incredulous, I am currently taking time off of school and have returned to living, working and breathing in the California air – specifically at Apple's headquarters in Cupertino.

As someone who has never stayed long in one place (Idaho, Pennsylvania, Alabama, North Carolina and California have all been home, some more than once), the prospect of returning to the same place in California was a bit more than terrifying when the opportunity first fortuitously fell in my lap. I had many reservations: I would have to take time off of school. I would not graduate with my Levine cohort. I would fall out of sync with my classmates. This was not my plan.

Somehow, dealing with new circumstances always circles back to my experience on the pre-freshmen National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) trip. NOLS taught me an important lesson about

pushing yourself out of your personal comfort zone. Pushing to the edge of discomfort (the “red” zone) opens up more opportunity for learning and personal growth. So with the help and support of the Levine Scholars Program and UNC Charlotte, I calmed down, got excited about the opportunity, and took a six-month co-op working at Apple for the iPhone and Apple Watch Product Design team. So what have I learned since returning to California?

1. California is so green when it rains. The unusual rain has caused seasons to have little meaning in California this year. I missed the snow days in North Carolina, but spring flowers started in January!
2. Intern culture is incredible. When people from all over the world, usually sharing similar technical passions, come together in a new place it makes for wonderful adventures.
3. Companies are wildly multifaceted. I am learning completely



different concepts and skills now than I did during my previous internship with Apple.

4. More than just a point A to B comfort zone, a technical comfort zone exists coming out of an academic environment. For me, jumping right into a mechanical engineering position has pushed me to put my school-based knowledge into action. It has solidified my book learning while teaching me to have a new technical perspective for when I return to school.

5. California weather – constant clear blue skies, 70 and sunny with no humidity – will always be my favorite weather.

For anyone entering or currently in college, your original idea of where you see yourself after graduation, what you think you will study, and when you think you will graduate can and probably will change. And you will survive the deviation.



Left: San Franciscans enjoy the city's abundance of green and outdoor space. From top: Jaden (right) enjoys dinner with some of her fellow Apple interns; San Francisco's famous Land's End Labyrinth; Jaden (right) visits the Golden Gate Bridge with two of her fellow interns

Documenting the Life and ‘Times’

By Leysha Caraballo '19

Coming to UNC Charlotte as an out-of-state student, I was extremely unfamiliar with the city, let alone the campus. The only people I knew were the ones with whom I spent 25 days in the wilderness through National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS); the only places I could find were the ones that held my classes. I wanted to change that and begin to feel comfortable in a place that was still hard to call home. I looked at many different clubs and organizations that could possibly fit my interests.

Throughout high school, I was very interested in journalism through the school yearbook. We worked closely with the newspaper, and I always enjoyed the dynamic of work between writers, photographers and the layout staff. Last year, I discovered my love for photography, and I wanted to find a way to use my Canon Rebel T3 camera on a regular basis here on campus. In my search for the right organization, one of them really stuck out to me – *Niner Times*, our school newspaper. My fellow Levine Scholar Casey Aldridge '17 helped me get a feel for what *Niner Times* was about and guided me in the right direction. I decided to attend a meeting, and I am so glad I did.



Leysha covering the Walk the Moon concert at the Fillmore Charlotte

Niner Times has helped me explore everything UNC Charlotte has to offer and more. Through my assignments, I have attended basketball, soccer, tennis, softball and baseball games. I have the best seats in the house for each one of them, especially basketball, where I get to sit right on the baseline to take pictures. I have gone to concerts at the Fillmore Charlotte for Walk the Moon and covered events on campus such as the Latin American Festival. As a staff photographer, I am also paid for every picture that gets published on ninertimes.com as well as in the print newspaper. I have never had a paid job before, so this was a big moment for me. Through *Niner Times*, I have even been able to test out my writing skills. I have had five articles published online. I never thought of myself as a writer – considering that I am more on the design side of journalism – but developing my skills in other areas has been a wonderful challenge.

Thanks to *Niner Times*, I have met some incredible people and gotten so comfortable at UNC Charlotte that I can easily call it my home away from home. Without this organization, I would have kept to myself rather than branching out and taking advantage of what UNC Charlotte has to offer. It is my way to continue my passions for journalism and photography and has inspired me to apply for the art major. Fall semester was one of the best experiences of my life, and I am excited to continue my journey here through *Niner Times* and the Levine Scholars Program.



One of Leysha's original photos, published on the Niner Times website

Engineering Leadership Academy

By Daniel Hicks '18

In my experience, leadership training programs generally have something in common: they are boring. It is not really that the information is not valuable or applicable; to the contrary, it usually is. The problem, as I see it, has more to do with leadership itself. The idea of leadership is so abstract and uniquely viewed by every individual that it is often hard to hone in on. To understand leadership is to understand a very nuanced topic with countless interpretations. I feel that leadership is best understood (and most fun) when it is made tangible through real examples, stories and hands-on activities. So far, the Engineering Leadership Academy has taken this approach and, as a result, has been anything but boring.

The Leadership Academy is organized so that each year a new cohort is admitted. That cohort stays together throughout the program, which lasts about a year. The instruction is divided into five modules – three are off-campus retreats, one is a workshop given by Areva and the final is a capstone service project. At this point, I have participated in just one of the modules, which took place in November at Haw River State Park. The weekend retreat gave me the chance to get to know 20 sophomore and junior



Daniel Hicks (top row, fourth from right) enjoyed a weekend retreat with his Engineering Leadership Academy cohort and faculty at Haw River State Park

engineering students from all disciplines, none of whom I knew prior to the retreat. I also had the opportunity to learn from a few industry professionals, each with different backgrounds, about their experience in engineering and their knowledge of leadership.

The experience I had assured me that I had made the right decision in joining the program. My fears that it would become simply another boring leadership program are gone, and I am now eager to see what else the Engineering Leadership Academy has in store.

Exploring the World of Public Health

By Sanjana Prabhu '16

As a public health major, I was incredibly excited to have the opportunity this past November to attend the annual meeting of the American Public Health Association (APHA) in Chicago. This is a conference for highly motivated, committed and passionate public health students and practitioners to meet and discuss current developments in the field.

I went to Chicago to learn, network and present my research on public health program evaluation. My poster, titled “Healthy Futures Starting in the Kitchen: Evaluating a childcare facility staff training program targeting childhood obesity in Mecklenburg County,” detailed the results of a full program evaluation I conducted at a workshop administered by the Mecklenburg County Health Department. Program planning and evaluation is a big part of health education and promotion. I enjoyed

being able to take my research and share it with like-minded professionals interested in this same subject.

While at the APHA conference, I attended several sessions on a variety of topics I sought to explore further, including Latino health, Asian and Pacific Islander health, global health, childhood obesity and public health filmmaking. I also networked with many graduate programs and companies (read: frantically searching for job opportunities), something I highly appreciated as a senior on the verge of graduation. Of course, I took a quick metro ride to Michigan Avenue in downtown Chicago to see “the Bean” or Cloud Gate, a famous architectural landmark!

All in all, it was a remarkable opportunity to expand my knowledge of all that public health encompasses. It was invigorating, enlightening and refreshing to be in that space, surrounded by thousands of public health practitioners. I was convinced that I have picked the right profession, and moreover, I was inspired, having seen many potential paths that I can take in my career.

This semester, I continued to gain experience by serving as an abstract reviewer for APHA, where I was exposed to a range of public health projects from across the nation. I also presented my research at the American Medical Student Association (AMSA) National Convention in Washington, D.C. in April. I look forward to being an advocate for the merging of public health and medicine and joining the student discussion on improving our nation’s healthcare.

Going Greek

By Kyle Henson '18



As the summer closed and school began ramping up in Charlotte, I made the decision to explore Greek Life as I had made friends who recommended it to me. I went into it blind, looking to learn as much as I could about the different fraternities and what each of them could offer me through a process called Rush Week. This week is filled with meeting brothers from the different fraternities through various events. I came in with what I wanted in a fraternity, and they came from the perspective of what they wanted in a new member. The key is to find an organization that fits both of these, which luckily I did.

Greek Life has given me the chance to expand my connection to campus. This is accomplished through social and philanthropic events. In the fall, some of my brothers and I shaved our heads to raise funds for the American Cancer Society. Since then, we have held a toy drive for Toys for Tots as well as an oyster roast to benefit Big Brothers Big Sisters. Giving back to the community is a big part of what we do and getting to do so with 50 other 18-22 year old guys is a beneficial experience.

Along with that, I have met people in other Greek organizations as well in other parts of campus. Learning how to make and cultivate these relationships is something that I wanted to get out of my college experience. These friendships will follow me long after I walk across the stage at graduation.

Greek organizations have a large focus on history and what has come before us. This is something that separates them from other organizations on campus. We share our rituals and experience with alumni for more than 100 years. It cultivates this feeling of being connected to something that is much larger than yourself or anything that you could do by yourself. That is a powerful feeling.

Being a member of a Greek organization has also enhanced the social side of my college experience. It has put me in situations where I am forced to interact with my peers in order to run an effective organization. These skills are going to help me moving forward into my career and even in other personal relationships. It gives me the opportunity to practice these skills in an environment that allows me to fail, and in turn learn from my failures and the failures of those around me.

I wanted to join a meaningful campus organization that utilized my skills, while leaving me a more balanced individual. I found that in joining Greek Life, and it is a decision that I would make all over again.



*Top: Kyle shaves his head for a fundraiser to benefit the American Cancer Society;
Bottom: Kyle (top row, second from left) with his fraternity brothers*

Around the World

Austin Halbert '15

Stockholm, Sweden

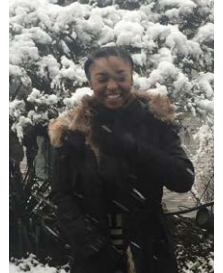
Austin's Fulbright fellowship research in corporate sustainability and sustainable development in Sweden has led him to interview executives from top Swedish companies, government officials and non-governmental organization leaders. From the Nobel Prize Award Ceremony to the Northern Lights in the Arctic Circle, Austin has enjoyed experiencing the cultural and natural resources that Sweden has to offer.



Joneka Percentie '17

Seoul, South Korea

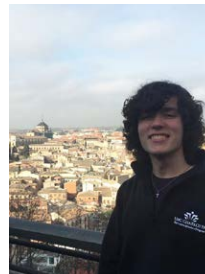
When Joneka is not taking classes in Korean, international communication or gender and sexuality, she explores shopping districts, traditional markets and street food. She is enjoying learning Korean. "There is an expression that describes the sudden cold right before spring arrives. We are right in the middle of it, and I am eager for warm, spring weather and new adventures with friends."



Esteban Mendieta '18

Seville, Spain

Esteban's study abroad experience has immersed him in Spanish culture, and he is enjoying time spent with his host family, his new Sevillian friends, soccer games and local festivals. "My absolute favorite aspect of my stay in Sevilla has been being able to get into the culture, the daily life, rhythm, mindset and heart of the welcoming people here."



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.