



2024-2025

LEVINE SCHOLARS PROGRAM

Annual Report

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“Civic engagement, in addition to continual involvement in a community or organization, is being able to step up in a time of unprecedented difficulty. It is a beautiful and fitting thing that the LSP has been able to step in to fill these needs.”

ANNABELLE HILL '26 AND LILY KATE WITCHER '27



From OUR DIRECTOR



This has been an exciting year for the Levine Scholars Program. We successfully recruited our 16th cohort of scholars representing 6 states and 11 North Carolina counties. As is always the case, the more than 100 university staff, faculty and program alumni who assisted with the selection process were impressed and humbled by the achievements and contributions already made by the incoming scholars. New to this year's finalist program was the inclusion of an in-person alumni panel, as well as a new civic engagement project: a scholar-curated art exhibit profiling the creative work of several of our current scholars and alumni. The gallery was the perfect venue for the Conversations with Alumni reception for finalists' parents.

We are deeply grateful to The Leon Levine Foundation for their renewal this year of the gift that supports the scholarship. Their tremendous generosity deepens and broadens the support provided to each scholar especially in the areas of NOLS and international experiences. For the first time, the gift also includes annual cost of living increases and provides permanent allocations to the Cultural Immersion and ASPIRE Funds. The latter supports many of the extracurriculars that help distinguish LSP from its competitors. A service-based alternative spring break, fall and spring Charlotte Immersion, monthly builds with Habitat for Humanity and making meals at Ronald McDonald House, support for required professional exams such as the MCAT, LSAT and GRE and the Senior Retreat are among the opportunities that are made possible through the ASPIRE Fund.

In addition to sharing the highlights of the past year, this annual report shines particular light on one of the program's core values: civic engagement. There are many ways our scholars uphold this value but perhaps the most impactful is through their civic engagement projects. Since the inception of the Levine Scholars Program, a signature feature has been the availability of an \$8,000 grant with which each scholar can partner with a local nonprofit to co-create a project that meets an unmet or pressing community need. To release these funds, scholars prepare a proposal outlining the project's desired goal and impact, and its implementation plan and timeline. Scholars also submit a line item budget and a budget justification as well as a statement about the project's sustainability. LSP staff assist scholars in the development of their proposals and budgets and approve both before fund dispersal and project implementation. Sophomore seminar and whole group meetings introduce scholars to best practices of civic engagement and proposal development. On completion of their project or prior to graduation (whichever comes first), scholars must also submit a final report to the LSP Office that asks them to reflect on their civic engagement experience, learning and impact. It is a robust process that yields projects that are meaningful to the scholars and their nonprofit partners. **The impact felt by communities supported by civic engagement grants is deep and long-lasting.**

Over the years, the LSP Civic Engagement grant has supported a wide range of projects both on campus and throughout Charlotte. In addition to those uplifted in this annual report, scholars have used their funds to build a demonstration bee yard with Discovery Place Nature and Bee Downtown; construct a kayak launch on the Rocky River with the Catawba Lands Conservancy; collaborate with Habitat for Humanity to pilot a college campus Playhouse Build; run a book and literacy fair with our Bridge for Kids; develop a series of health and wellness workshops for residents of the Salvation Army's Center of Hope; partner with the Pediatric Gastroenterology unit at Levine Children's Hospital to launch a cooking class and support group for patients and their families. The list goes on.

On the wall leading to our Levine Scholars Program offices, we recently added a quotation from Leon Levine himself: "I have begun to create a legacy of giving, which perpetuates these essential principles and values: compassion, character and judgment. It is this legacy that I charge each of you with fulfilling." Through sustained volunteer work, internships with nonprofit organizations, purposefully designed coursework, staff mentoring and impactful civic engagement projects, Levine Scholars are exceeding these expectations. **We trust Mr. Levine would be proud.**

Heather Smith, Ph.D.
Faculty Director

Pictured above: Erin Stewart '18 and Sydney Welch '19 present their civic engagement project, Not in My City, at the Campus Compact Conference alongside LSP Director Dr. Heather Smith.

For the Love of **CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**

Civic engagement is a defining pillar of the Levine Scholars Program, shaping scholars into well-rounded leaders who are deeply committed to service. Through sustained volunteer work, internships with nonprofit organizations, collaborative grant projects, and purposefully designed coursework, Levine Scholars are equipped with the leadership skills and empathy needed to make meaningful change.

Inspired by the mission of The Leon Levine Foundation, scholars dedicate themselves to improving the human condition by creating measurable, lasting impact. A cornerstone of the program is access to an \$8,000 civic engagement grant allowing each scholar to work with a nonprofit organization in Charlotte to identify an unmet need and lead a project that betters our community.

***The youth are the catalyst for change.
And the future is riding on how we perceive it—
we have a future in our hands, and are
advocating for each other, advocating for
a better world for all of us.***

ABBY CAMERON '26
CLEANAIRE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT PROJECT

Lily Kate Witcher '27 celebrates World Refugee Day with fellow interns



Northwest School of the Arts students pose with their CleanAire art contest entries



The Ronald McDonald House crew prepares a monthly meal for families





Breast cancer patients and survivors, including Dr. Maren Coffman (back row, second from right), gather during Fall Family Day

METASTATIC BREAST CANCER PROGRAM THROUGH CAROLINA BREAST FRIENDS

MADISON LANAI '25, KENNEDY CARPENTER '26, SOPHIA TORREBIARTE '27

Carolina Breast Friends provides breast cancer survivors and thrivers with access to resources, education, and fellowship at any stage of their journey. Grounded in qualitative research and collaboration with compassionate healthcare professionals, the MBC Program focuses on addressing both the physical and emotional needs of MBC patients through therapeutic, community-building activities.

Madison, what was your inspiration for this project?

I co-founded the MBC Program alongside David Buckner '24. My interest in supporting MBC patients grew after speaking with Dr. Maren Coffman, an Associate Professor in the School of Nursing at UNC Charlotte, who had recently been diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer. She shared her concerns about the lack of resources and support for individuals with MBC in the Charlotte community.

Kennedy, why did you choose this project?

This initiative spoke near and dear to my heart, as I lost both my grandmother and my great aunt—after whom I am named—to breast cancer. As a future nurse, I believe strongly in the holistic nature of our profession, where we are called not only to treat the disease but also to support the emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being of our patients and their families. This project embodied that very

essence of nursing, emphasizing the importance of compassionate care and community support in the face of such a devastating diagnosis.

Sophia, what was your favorite part of the project?

One of the most impactful experiences for me was during a candle-making workshop with these women. It was meaningful to see them get into the activity and create something that was totally their own, but what stuck with me the most was how comfortable they felt talking to me. They shared their experiences and I felt genuinely honored that they trusted me with those moments. It was inspiring to see how much joy and strength they radiated, even while facing something so difficult. I'm truly grateful to be part of a program that not only supports these women but also gives them space to relax, connect and experience moments of peace and happiness in the midst of everything they're going through.

HEART TO HEART THROUGH THE YMCA OF GREATER CHARLOTTE

RHOEN HOFF '25

The YMCA is dedicated to providing comprehensive programs and services that enrich communities—and all of the people who live in them—across the country in fulfillment of their mission. Guided by their core values of caring, honesty, respect and responsibility, the Y is dedicated to giving people of all ages, backgrounds and walks of life the opportunity to reach their full potential with dignity.

What is the goal of your civic engagement project?

H2H is a CPR certification program designed to bring life-saving skills to the communities that are least likely to receive them, but most likely to need them: mainly Black and Hispanic communities in Mecklenburg County. Our collaboration with the Keith Family YMCA allows us to host CPR certification classes free of cost, providing free childcare and subsidized transportation through CATS bus passes, removing two of the most common barriers that prevent many people from accessing essential training.

Why did you choose this project?

I have always been interested in healthcare justice and making sure that healthcare and healthcare knowledge is not just a luxury, but also a right. It is important to do work that contributes to lessening the

healthcare inequities that exist in this world and to improve health outcomes for communities that fare worse than others due to structural inequities. H2H has allowed me to do more than just understand these inequities, it has given me the space to act in order to reduce the inequities.

What was your favorite part of the project?

One of the most rewarding parts of this project has been connecting with the people who come to our classes. Everyone comes with a different story: some seeking recertification for work, others want to be prepared to help their communities and many are UNC Charlotte students who just want to learn CPR. These conversations remind me that this project is about far more than the technical skills of CPR. It is about connection, it is about sharing knowledge and it is about having an influence on the health and health knowledge of the community.



Chandu Changalvala '25 and other student volunteers participate in an H2H certification session



Sylvia Srinivass '25 leads a college-readiness workshop at a local library

THE COLLEGE READINESS WORKSHOP PROGRAM THROUGH THE CHARLOTTE MECKLENBURG LIBRARY

SYLVIA SRINIWASS '25

The Charlotte Mecklenburg Library is one of America's leading urban public libraries, serving a community of more than one million citizens in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina. Through locations, targeted outreach and online, the Library delivers exceptional services and programs, with a mission to create a community of readers and empower individuals with free access to information and the universe of ideas.

What is the goal of your civic engagement project?

The College Readiness Workshop Program aims to supplement resources of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library by supporting students through their college application process until they can confidently say "I can succeed in my post-high school endeavors."

Why did you choose this project?

I was excited to work with a nonprofit partner that had been such an important part of my childhood. I remembered the uncertainty I had felt when I applied to college and the questions regarding what city I would end up in and what major I would pursue. This civic engagement project was an opportunity to give back to the community by offering not only the support that data shows is needed but also the guidance and safe space that every student deserves to have as they decide where to spend the next few years after high school.

What was your favorite part of the project?

My favorite part of leading these workshops is connecting with curious and ambitious high school students. I love hearing about their favorite classes in high school, what they hope to major in, whether they want to study abroad, and what student organizations they want to join. Over the course of the year, even the shyest students have confidently created post-secondary school goals for themselves. Participant feedback has been overwhelmingly positive: students have shared that they feel more prepared to start college in the fall, are excited to be independent and feel more comfortable asking for help and using available resources to support their success. And who knows? Maybe one year, a workshop participant will become a Levine Scholar!



Scholars prepare to welcome finalists to the 2025 Finalist Program event

LEVINE SCHOLARS CLASS OF 2029 SCHOLAR SELECTION

18%
*increase in
nominations &
applications
over last year*

This year marked a notable step forward in the continual evolution of the program's recruitment and selection process. Building on the foundation of LSP's recruitment strategy, we saw an increase of 18 percent in both nominations and applications. This increase was from NC and out-of-state—clear evidence that the program continues to expand its reach in attracting the highest achieving students. To meet this momentum, we launched a new centralized reviewer portal, streamlining access to training and application materials and making it easier for reviewers to engage meaningfully at each stage of the selection process.

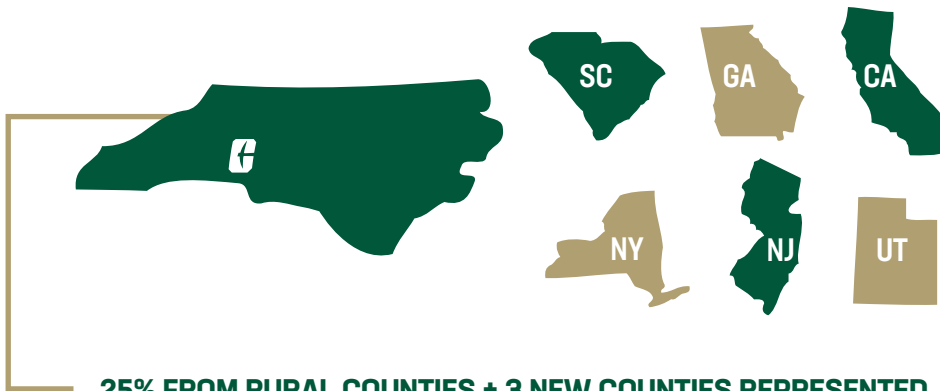
We also expanded and diversified our review committees, ensuring a broader range of perspectives and incorporating more program alumni in the selection of the finalists. Notably, nearly every review committee this year included an LSP alum. Alongside university faculty and staff, alumni voices and insight enriched the selection process and helped us recruit the best and brightest to Charlotte. To further deepen this connection, we introduced an in-person alumni panel during this year's Finalist Program, offering prospective scholars a window into the community and legacy they aspire to join.

About the 20 Selected Scholars

2,850
NOMINATIONS

1,260
APPLICATIONS

60% IN STATE • 40% OUT OF STATE



25% FROM RURAL COUNTIES + 3 NEW COUNTIES REPRESENTED
(Granville, Richmond, Stokes)

55% FEMALE • 45% MALE

1400
AVG. SAT SCORE

4.48
AVG. WEIGHTED GPA

32
AVG. ACT SCORE

3.89
AVG. UNWEIGHTED GPA

From Rent to the Revolution

HOW THE ARTS TRANSFORMED MY FIRST YEAR IN COLLEGE

RACHEL ALEXANDER '28

I have been serenaded in New York's East Village, transported through the wonderful Land of Oz, launched into space aboard the International Space Station, and inspired by the revolution in 1776 Manhattan—all before the end of my first year of college. You may be wondering how this could be possible. **The Levine Scholars Program Intro to the Arts Programming**, hosted by none other than our beloved Dr. Michael Richardson, introduces Levine Scholars to not just the Charlotte arts scene, but to the rest of the world through art and storytelling.

My first experience attending a “Dr. Mike show,” as the events are affectionately termed by scholars, was watching a production of *RENT*. The stage and the set up for the show were a sight to behold, as the show was to be performed in an immersive format. Cast members were in character and interacting with the audience as attendees filed into what quickly became a full house. Given that this is to be a recount of all of my cultural enrichment experiences, I will spare the details, but suffice it to say that the show left everyone in the audience stunned—as was evidenced by the nearly five-minute long standing ovation. Personally, I was struck by the magnitude of what we had just witnessed. Not only was the show the culmination of months of immense dedication and hard work on behalf of the performers and the creative team, but also, it was the ultimate synthesis of their efforts with those from the technical crew and theater staff.

In addition to the wonder and amazement that came from attending the show was a deep sense of camaraderie with those in the audience, particularly the other scholars that had also been in attendance. It was such a beautiful feeling to know that each and every one of us had been left with the same sense of marvel after what we had just experienced. That night was the start of my newfound appreciation for the arts.



Frida Guerrero Ochoa '28, Rokia Sissoko '28, and Rachel Alexander '28 await a show in Uptown Charlotte

That night was the start of my newfound appreciation for the arts.

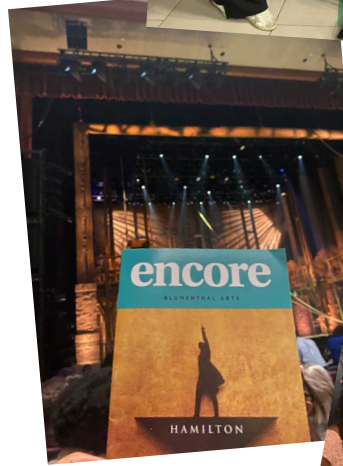
I was also fortunate to have attended the Charlotte Symphony's *The Wizard of Oz* in Concert, which was sublime. It was truly remarkable to hear the live orchestra renditions of such beautiful melodies alongside a timeless classic. My experience with *Space Explorers: The Infinite* also evoked the same feelings of awe-inspiring admiration for the natural art in the world—and space—that surrounds us.

Looking back on it now, I truly believe that my experiences with the Levine Scholars Program cultural enrichment programming have changed my perspective on life. Seeing how art can be made from the darkest of times (as I saw in *RENT*) but also from the most magical of moments (as I saw with the Charlotte Symphony) and the art that exists in our natural world (as I saw with *The Infinite*) has brought about a newfound respect for the beauty in each day. I hope to continue to nurture this as I further immerse myself in the vibrant arts scene here in the Queen City. I am extremely grateful to Dr. Mike and the Levine Scholars Program for providing me and my fellow scholars with these experiences, and I cannot wait to see what the future holds.

I am so glad that I get to experience college here in the Queen City, where, like in Hamilton, "History is happening. . . in the greatest city in the world!"



Scholars, Dr. Mike and a program alumnus with the director of the Charlotte Ballet



A group of scholars enjoys a pre-show dinner together

WITH *Gratitude*



This extraordinary gift is a testament to Leon and Sandra Levine's **deep belief in the power of education** and the potential of our students. It ensures UNC Charlotte remains a destination for the **nation's most promising young leaders**, while amplifying the Levines' legacy of generosity, impact and transformation across our campus and throughout the Charlotte region.

CHANCELLOR SHARON L. GABER

Meet the **LSP TEAM**



Heather Smith, Ph.D.
Faculty Director



Zack Newsome '03
Associate Director



Stephanie Norander, Ph.D.
Faculty Associate Director



Tiffany Kelley, Ph.D. '25
Coordinator of Scholar
Support and Initiatives



Misty Morin '19
Assistant Director of Alumni
Engagement and Communications



Tonderai Mushipe '12, '16
University Program Associate



Carlette Smith
Business Services Coordinator