OPENING A DOOR
Scholars Offer Students Path To Bigger World
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Dear Alumni Friends,

Steven Ervin describes himself as a highly competitive person who likes to do well on a test or in a contest. Steven also is a senior middle grades education major with a concentration in mathematics who is student teaching at Northwest Cabarrus Middle School as part of the College’s Culturally Responsive Teaching (CResT) program.

In that middle school classroom, Steven has encountered the most difficult competition he has ever faced.

“I went into student teaching with a competitive mindset that I was going to compete against a test, that I need to be the best teacher, and I need to have the highest test scores,” says Steven. “But now, I have faced a competition against something completely different.”

During his student teaching in fall 2018, Steven worked with a struggling student who talked about dropping out of school when he turned 16, the age when students can legally drop out in almost all North Carolina school systems. Steven and his mentors at UNC Charlotte and at Northwest Cabarrus Middle School have kept their focus on helping this student and other students understand that they have the staying power to finish the race.

Steven is committed to help this and other students envision the world of opportunities that education can afford them. He also knows he is not alone. His mentors are committed to coaching him and his fellow CResT scholars, so that they can discover how to help their students succeed.

This story about Steven and the other CResT scholars is one illustration of how people in the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences integrate research, teaching and service into the work being done in the broader community. With our efforts, we are keenly focused on helping our students grow into global citizens who can look outside themselves to truly “see” others.

As Ryan Kilmer, a professor with the Community Psychology Research Lab in our Department of Psychological Science, says, “This is about relationships, partnerships, and building trust.”

For close to two decades, Ryan, his colleagues, their students, and alumni of the community psychology program have collaborated with up to a dozen Charlotte-area agencies and community organizations that are focused on children and families. In our story about their work, we see the progress that has been made in enhancing the capacity of agencies, programs, and systems to track meaningful data to guide decision-making and wise use of resources.

In a similar manner, Meck60+, a needs assessment survey of seniors and their family caregivers, is using data to offer insights into the main health challenges, the use of services, community satisfaction and family care giving outcomes for Mecklenburg County’s diverse senior population. Researchers from the UNC Charlotte Gerontology Program conducted the survey, working with community and campus collaborators. They have just released their initial findings and are now gathering community response and recommendations to include in the final report.

Meanwhile, our students in the Master of Public Administration Program in recent years have completed over 30 capstone service learning projects, collaborating with local government and nonprofit agencies. This spring the capstone class will partner on an evaluation of the Culture Blocks program of the Arts & Science Council. Dedicated to building stronger relationships with specific geographic areas, Culture Blocks helps vibrant programming meet people exactly where they are: at the recreation center, at the library, and beyond.

These stories and others in this issue of Exchange detail efforts to connect directly with individuals and institutions to address community needs.

One final article looks at the varied efforts of the Department of English to engage around the issue of literacy. These pursuits range from running a Seuss-a-thon with Park Road Books, to developing a book club for people who are homeless, to creating the Center City Literary Festival, which is celebrating its seventh year on Saturday, March 30 at UNC Charlotte Center City.

English Department Chair Mark West sums up the cultural catalyst role played by the annual Seuss-a-thon – and, by extension, other such endeavors. “It is bringing together people who appreciate imaginative stories, and in the process, it is creating a time and place for people to make their own connections with stories and with each other,” Mark says.

The story of Steven Irvin’s student is palpable evidence that making these connections must be a College imperative. We invite your interest and engagement.
Emerald green signs dot the street corners in The Renaissance, a redeveloped community in west Charlotte, marking Innovation Drive, New Renaissance Way, Achievement Lane, Ascension Way and Triumph Drive. The signs do more than direct travelers. They serve as symbols of hope in a community working to improve residents’ access to quality housing, education, health, wellness and – above all – opportunity, through a powerful cradle-to-career approach.

The Renaissance, with funding from the Charlotte Housing Authority and other supporters, focuses on factors that research shows can make an impact on people’s economic mobility.

Among them: New mixed-income housing replaced a public housing complex, while Renaissance West STEAM Academy and the Howard Levine Child Development Center work to revitalize the community. Additionally, residents have access to career, wellness, and other resources that make a difference in their lives.

A core team of UNC Charlotte faculty members, graduate students, and alumni affiliated with the Community Psychology Research Lab is important to this community effort. Team members work closely on data collection and evaluation, in collaboration with the Renaissance West Community Initiative (RWCI).

The partnership with The Renaissance community is just one example of the collaborative nature of the UNC Charlotte lab. Every year for close to two decades, the lab has collaborated with up to a dozen Charlotte-area agencies and community organizations.

“Our aim is to enhance the capacity of agencies, programs and systems to track meaningful data that informs their decision-making and guides what they can do with their resources,” says Ryan Kilmer, a professor in the Department of Psychological Science. “And, as a bottom line, we want our work to benefit the services and supports for kids and families.”

Leading the lab with Kilmer are department colleagues and community psychologists Jim Cook, Victoria Scott and Andrew Case. The lab is staffed by advanced graduate students who work with agencies at no cost, as part of their coursework. Some students are hired as graduate assistants.
for more long-term work, and some go on to take full-time evaluation and leadership roles within the organizations. Undergraduate students participate through a learning community and as research scholars.

With each community collaboration, team members focus on capacity building and sustainability. They concentrate particularly on the issues of early childhood education, mental health, public housing, child welfare and integrated primary and behavioral health care.

“We’re working at a systems level rather than an individual one—and with multiple organizations at a community level,” says Cook. “Understanding systems complexity is a huge part of this work and includes knowing how they operate and understanding dynamic settings, multiple actors and ambiguity. It takes patience and persistence to comprehend that impact takes time.”

**Partnership Perspective**

With the Council for Children’s Rights, lab team members have worked for years with multi-agency teams to address issues related to child custody, mental health, social services and juvenile justice.

“They have provided advice and guidance to us, as we have undertaken and developed a data and research policy practice within our agency that informs our individual advocacy and provides us with the basis to make systemic and institutional changes in the community,” says Bob Simmons, executive director of the Council for Children’s Rights. “This really has a big impact on the ability of children and their families to take advantage of opportunities in the community.”

 Agencies know they need to gather and analyze data, but sometimes lack the knowledge or resources to do so. Alternatively they sometimes require a broader understanding of how to connect data to outcomes identified as important.

One long-standing partnership connected to economic mobility is the team’s work, led by Cook and Kilmer, with the publicly funded Pre-K program in Charlotte, particularly the Bright Beginnings program. The early childhood education programs serve 4-year-olds who have experienced disadvantage. In close partnership with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, the team helped measure impact, clarify goals, develop measures and processes, and pilot observation tools, before issuing a public report on the program in 2013-14.

Since that time, the lab has obtained funding from the Institute of Education Sciences to assist the program’s ability to collect, manage, and use data, and to develop innovative strategies. Now, data is being used to enhance the coaching given to teachers to help them be more effective.

**Respect Builds Trust**

In addition to sharing information about collecting, analyzing and applying data to drive outcomes, lab team members bring immense knowledge of academic literature, a history of obtaining funding to support the work, and a record of national and state awards that recognize their impact. Yet, they do not see themselves as having all the answers.

“This is about relationships, partnerships and building trust,” Kilmer says. “I might know about applied research and evaluation, but our partners are the experts on their families and their kids. They know best about their organizational dynamics and the people they serve. We have to appreciate the strengths, capacity, and expertise they bring to the table, and communicate effectively about mutually beneficial objectives.”

Victoria Scott continued, “It’s important to take time to understand the context of the organization. We understand the importance of readiness for particular steps. Our program does well in training students to listen intentionally, and to identify these markers, and being able to converse with organizations in a way that matches their readiness.”

In its work with The Renaissance in West Charlotte, the UNC Charlotte team collaborates with the project manager of Building Uplifted Families, Monica Thomas. “The data and evaluation team from UNC Charlotte is essential to making sure we stay on track, because we are interested in sustainability,” Thomas says.

Thomas leads a team of professionals known as life navigators, who work with The Renaissance community residents as they access information, education, and life planning services, and as they advocate for themselves. Funded by a national grant from The BUILD Health Challenge and by two local health care systems, Building Uplifted Families includes Novant Health, Atrium Health and Mecklenburg County Public Health.
Scott leads the data and evaluation efforts along with Michael Dulin, director for the Academy of Population Health Innovation in UNC Charlotte’s College of Health and Human Services.

“The ultimate aim of the initiative is to improve social mobility and the access to opportunity in The Renaissance community,” Scott says. “Two healthcare systems that have traditionally been competitors locally are working hand-in-hand, along with a host of other organizations, to link Renaissance residents to resources.”

In concrete terms, the UNC Charlotte collaborators worked with RWCI staff to create a customized data management system, which allows life navigators to input and dig into data to better understand the needs of residents of The Renaissance. They are also using the data to provide detailed updates to funders and other stakeholders.

“Our relationship with the lab team members allows life navigators to have complete autonomy in what they’re doing; they are there to support and guide us,” says Thomas. “They make recommendations, but we don’t feel as though it’s an academic study. Life navigators are experts, and the UNC Charlotte team helps us interpret the work. We don’t immediately see the beauty of it until the evaluation team shows us an automated picture of what the data is saying.”

Jackie Tynan ’16, who has joined RWCI as senior associate program officer, is an important collaborator. She earned a psychology master’s degree from UNC Charlotte and is now pursuing a doctoral degree in the community psychology training program within the health psychology doctoral program at UNC Charlotte.

“Nonprofit work is fast paced and leaves little time for a small organization like RWCI to focus on evaluation and outcomes,” she says. “Both of these, however are critical to the success of any community organization. This partnership with UNC Charlotte allows us to do our work without missing out on measurements and reporting our outcomes.”

Growing Skills

In another partnership, UNC Charlotte’s Andrew Case works closely with The Males Place, a nonprofit whose mission is to provide comprehensive and prevention-based behavior health educational programming, mentoring, and life skills training necessary for manhood development for African American boys ages 12 to 18.

“I bring a deep passion for working with marginalized communities, specifically people of color and communities of color, to create pathways to resources and better outcomes,” Case says.

Since 2009, The Males Place has operated a community garden that provides a variety of crops to the local community. “Adolescent members of the community tend the garden as an opportunity to give back and as a means of gaining competency and a sense of confidence and self-worth as they develop into men,” he continues.

Case has worked with Reggie Singleton, founder and executive director of The Males Place, to develop what is known as a logic model, a tool used widely to evaluate the effectiveness of a program. It presents a picture of how a program works, including its main components and how they relate to one another, and how they are related to outcomes.

Libby Safrit ’97, a leader at another agency partner, views the Community Psychology Research Lab from both a student and partner perspective. She earned a master’s degree in clinical/community psychology from UNC Charlotte and now is the executive director of Teen Health Connection.

“You can do phenomenal work. But if you don’t have the evaluation component—if you don’t have a way to systemically measure the real impact of those dollars—no matter how great your work is, you will not be able to sustain your funding, nor will you be able to sustain your work,” she says. “That is what the partnership gives you.”

Similarly, Virginia Covill ’16, research and evaluation director with Communities In Schools (CIS) of Charlotte-Mecklenburg, sees the work from both vantage points. She completed a Ph.D. in community health psychology while working with community partners as a graduate student.

“Equally important to those we serve are the skills each party brings to the table,” she says. “For participating nonprofits and agencies, it’s their high level of expertise. For UNC Charlotte, it’s knowledge of data and its application. Knowing we can trust implicitly that our University partner holds social justice in high regard and shares the same respect for the challenges faced by individuals in our community makes the collaboration productive.”

Current and past partners, several with students and alumni holding leadership positions, include Charlotte Bilingual School, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Pre-K: Bright Beginnings, A Child’s Place, Circle de Luz, City of Charlotte, Communities in Schools: Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Community Culinary School of Charlotte, Council for Children’s Rights, The Males Place, McColl Center for Art + Innovation, MeckCARES, Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services, ParentVOICE, Renaissance West Community Initiative, Teen Health Connection, Thompson Child and Family Focus, and United Way of Central Carolinas.

Words and Images: Lynn Roberson | Image of The Males Place: Courtesy of The Males Place
Diane Gavarkavich (left) and Cherie Maestas co-lead the YourVoiceCLT online survey research platform.

With the launch of YourVoiceCLT, members of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg community have a new way to share their opinions on quality of life issues, community, and current events. The initiative is led by partners at UNC Charlotte, including the Urban Institute, the Public Policy Program, the Department of Political Science and Public Administration, and the Policy Opinion, Learning and Sentiment Lab.

The online survey research platform is designed to provide high quality public opinion data to civic organizations, community stakeholders, academics, and policymakers. These results will give decision-makers vital information about perceptions of key issues in the Charlotte area.

“Access to high quality information about public opinion is essential to a well-functioning city,” says YourVoiceCLT Academic Director Cherie Maestas, Rauch Professor of Political Science and director of the Public Policy Program. “Civic organizations and government officials can only respond to community needs when they have an accurate picture of how the community feels.”

The UNC Charlotte Urban Institute, a nonpartisan applied research and community outreach center, has facilitated representative surveys for more than 30 years. Diane Gavarkavich, director of research services and executive director of YourVoiceCLT, says YourVoiceCLT marks the next generation in this service.

“We work with many civic and community organizations that seek to improve the quality of life in Charlotte,” Gavarkavich says. “Our goal is for this panel to empower them with knowledge they can act upon.”

YourVoiceCLT participants will have their voices heard regularly throughout the year about issues that matter to them. A secure survey website allows them to access and take surveys at times that are convenient for them.

“We know from research and public sentiment that people want their opinions heard but cannot always make it to public venues or may not feel comfortable reaching out to representatives,” Gavarkavich says. “Launching a secure online platform will help lessen barriers to participation.”

YourVoiceCLT is seeking volunteers who represent the full range of households and opinions in Charlotte to sign up to take surveys throughout the year to help local government, nonprofit, and community-focused organizations identify public needs and evaluate the impact of policies and programs. While they initially are focused on Mecklenburg County, plans call for regional expansion in later years.

The organizers say they are committed to hearing all voices and making this panel look as much like Charlotte-Mecklenburg County as possible, in terms of age, race, ethnicity, location, political affiliation, and other dimensions.

In addition to providing insights into pressing issues and informing positive change, YourVoiceCLT seeks to enhance the community research of University scholars and to educate both students and the community on public opinion research and its uses.

A key component in the future success of YourVoiceCLT is strong community partnerships. Community partners help to recruit participants, direct survey content, and maximize use of the results. Some of the partners include A Child’s Place, Aldersgate, Arts & Science Council, Centralina Council of Governments, Communities In Schools, the Community Building Initiative, the City of Charlotte, Crisis Assistance Ministry, Goodwill Industries of the Southern Piedmont, Johnson & Wales University, Livable Meck, Mecklenburg County, Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation, and the YMCA.

Individuals without internet access can participate by phone or in local public locations. Anyone 18 or older who resides in Mecklenburg County is encouraged to join. More information about the survey panel and how to sign up is available online at YourVoiceCLT.org.

Words and Logo: Courtesy of UNC Charlotte Urban Institute
Image: Lynn Roberson

Diane Gavarkavich (left) and Cherie Maestas co-lead the YourVoiceCLT online survey research platform.
When UNC Charlotte Gerontology Program Director Julian Montoro-Rodriguez voted last fall, he particularly noted the volunteers who were staffing the polling site.

“It’s the seniors who were running the show there,” Montoro-Rodriguez says. He observed that these elders had much to offer to the process – including their time, dedication, and expertise. Their presence also meant that someone had engaged them, which suggests that they are connected to the community and, likely, to people and resources they may need.

Montoro-Rodriguez’s observations during the election dovetail with what he and his collaborators are learning from the Meck60+ Community Needs Assessment Study. The study is intended to help people in the community understand the health status of seniors in Mecklenburg County and the array of programs needed to serve Mecklenburg County’s diverse senior population. It will also consider whether needs vary among seniors from differing ethnic, racial, geographic, age, and economic groups.

Southminster, a nonprofit retirement community, granted UNC Charlotte $200,000 for the Meck60+ study, which has drawn collaborators from across UNC Charlotte and the broader community.

“We hope to contribute to, and inspire, an important community conversation, which should include seniors and their families, as well as private and public organizations, civic groups, non-profit foundations, businesses, faith-based groups and others,” Montoro-Rodriguez says. Through the fall and winter, he and his collaborators have reached out to organizations and individuals to discuss the study’s initial findings and to seek input on recommendations for the final report, due out this spring.

“The next step after that would be to develop a plan for the community incorporating the needs of older adults and their families in the larger community,” he says. The ideal outcome would be for public sector leaders to commission a broad-based and inclusive strategic plan, he says.

Montoro-Rodriguez advocates that the research should be refreshed every two years, as Charlotte and the surrounding area are experiencing rapid growth and the demographic shift of an aging population. Projections predict that people over the age of 60 will make up 15% of the total population in Mecklenburg County by 2030.

The researchers surveyed 750 adults aged 60 and older and 130 family caregivers, considering that it was important to obtain...
first-hand data. Approximately half of the participants were contacted by random telephone dialing. The rest were interviewed at public libraries, community centers, churches, senior centers and agency locations, and at festivals and community events aimed at older adults.

Of the respondents, 70% said they were connected with church programs and activities, while 54% said they use public libraries. Just under half – 49% – use parks and recreation facilities. In lower numbers, 30% frequent senior centers, 26% use nutritional programs, 25% use community centers, and 24% use public transportation.

While the final report will focus on services older adults need, it also will recommend ways to build connections between older adults, youth, and children, which could help the seniors experience greater connections within the community, Montoro-Rodriguez says.

“This is an added benefit of this data because our community is interested in social mobility for children and youth, and seniors can play a role,” he says. “Everything that we are seeing here has implications for families and communities at all levels. One goal is to look at this data and see how older adults can contribute to improved social mobility for young people in Charlotte.”

Words and Images: Lynn Roberson
Vivid yellow, red, green and blue paint covers the cinder block wall of the Tuckaseegee Community Center in West Charlotte. Young community members work with a muralist to transform a once-plain wall into a vibrant colored postcard welcoming visitors into the community. Their art is part of the Arts & Science Council’s Culture Blocks program.

Funded by Mecklenburg County, Culture Blocks brings arts, science and history experiences into neighborhoods – at libraries, parks, recreation centers, and other community spaces. Culture Blocks embraces and celebrates the cultural life and desires of residents, connects communities to arts and cultural activities that speak to the community members’ interests, and seeks to break down barriers to participation with cultural organizations.

“This is not something we are doing for neighborhoods or for communities; this is something we are doing with communities, with neighbors, and that’s the whole basis of the Culture Blocks program,” says Holly Whisman, vice president for grants and services with the Arts & Science Council (ASC). “Culture Blocks started with five blocks.

The program then expanded to seven blocks, and now we’re at nine. The Culture Blocks team went out and made connections with people in neighborhood organizations, with artists in the community, with individuals who had a stake in the community.”

Since the initiative began, the Culture Blocks team has received positive feedback from the community members. Still, the team wants to know more and have the ability to better measure and understand the results.

“What really is the impact we are having in the community, and how can we shape the program going forward?” Whisman says. “The idea of access is central to Culture Blocks. So, for everyone, no matter what their background is, where they grew up or who their parents are, or where they’ve gone to school, we want everyone in this community to have access to high quality cultural experiences. Is Culture Blocks helping us move toward that goal? And, given what we find, how can we shape the program going forward to make sure we move toward that aspiration?”

This desire to better understand the impact of Culture Blocks led Whisman to reach out to Tom Barth, director of the UNC Charlotte Master of Public Administration (MPA) Program. As a graduate of UNC Charlotte's Public Policy Ph.D. Program, Whisman was aware of the MPA capstone class, and she knew the students could perform a valuable service by assessing the Culture Blocks program as their spring project.

Barth welcomed the call, realizing that the research project could provide the students the opportunity to gain real-world insights and have a positive influence on people's lives.

“Our MPA seminar provides teams of students with a service learning experience in public management through the capstone project,” Barth says. “The goal of the capstone is to combine students’ academic preparation with practical and applied experience. The capstone is sponsored by an area government or nonprofit agency. With this project, students will be working on research that could have broad implications for the community.”

Throughout the capstone process, students are guided by an MPA faculty member and an experienced local community consultant. The scholars conduct research to determine the impact of the designated program at the individual and community level.
The MPA student researchers will help Whisman and her colleagues at the ASC and their community partners answer questions such as:

**What are the long-term outcomes that Culture Blocks organizers and their partners should expect?**

**What is the experience of the providers of arts and culture programming?**

**What are the outcomes for the organizations that provide sites for the programming?**

**What can the literature — reports, academic studies, and other materials — tell the ASC about what is working or is not working elsewhere? Can the academic literature provide insights into what activities are the most effective in accomplishing certain goals?**

The information the capstone project yields could help the ASC and Mecklenburg County determine next steps for Culture Blocks. This approach echoes the data-driven focus that led to the creation of the Culture Blocks program.

A Cultural Vision Plan issued by a Mecklenburg County Cultural Life Task Force in 2014 described changes the ASC could make to enable equity and broader access to the arts and cultural offerings. During this process, data was collected that assessed the location of people and the connectivity that people had with the cultural organizations that the ASC was funding.

“There was a big shift in looking at equity and the distribution of resources, and part of that was the geographic distribution of resources,” Whisman says. “There’s a swath across Charlotte where people were not as likely to have connections with the cultural institutions we were funding. That’s not to say there was not culture in these neighborhoods, but the access to cultural programming we were funding was visibly limited in certain neighborhoods.”

This finding concerned the ASC leadership. A high concentration of the arts in a community leads to higher civic engagement, more social cohesion, higher child welfare, and lower poverty rates, according to research by the Americans for the Arts, a national nonprofit organization focused on advancing the arts and arts education.

When developing programming priorities, Culture Blocks staff meet with residents and community leaders to learn more about a community’s needs and its assets, such as artists and facilities. Those conversations take place at neighborhood meetings and community events and in one-on-one meetings. Staff members incorporate community feedback into the program.

The report by the UNC Charlotte students will provide additional data to help guide the ASC staff as they continue to work with community representatives and cultural program providers to identify partnerships, priorities, and resources to address participation barriers impacting area residents.

“We really believe that culture builds bridges between people and communities, and that’s part of the foundation we’ve been working on,” Whisman says.

Words: Whitney Pittman | Images: Courtesy of the Arts & Science Council
Author Roald Dahl believed deeply that children and books belong together. His beloved volumes, including Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, Matilda, The BFG, James and the Giant Peach, and many others, delight not only children, but also adults.

I had the privilege of interviewing Dahl about a year before his death in 1990. I concluded the interview by asking him if he found it more satisfying to write for children or adults. In his response, he commented on the importance of books in children’s lives.

“It’s more rewarding to write for children,” he told me. “When I am writing for adults, I’m just trying to entertain them. But a good children’s book does much more than entertain. It teaches children the use of words, the joy of playing with language. Above all, it helps children learn not to be frightened of books. Once they can get through a book and enjoy it, they realize that books are something that they can cope with. If they are going to amount to anything in life, they need to be able to handle books. If my books can help children become readers, then I feel I have accomplished something important.”

Members of the English Department at UNC Charlotte well understand Dahl’s point. We believe that doing what we can to ensure that all children have the opportunity to become readers is an important way we can support the community’s literacy – and social mobility – efforts.

We do so in a variety of ways, by connecting our scholarship, our teaching, and our expertise with our commitment to the broader community. Sometimes we do this through efforts focused on children, and other times, by focusing on adults and families.

Recently, I had a conversation with faculty member Meghan Barnes about an outreach project she did this past summer working with homeless people in Charlotte. She collaborated with the Urban Ministries Center and Moore Place to develop a book club for their residents. The project involved understanding the participants’ literacy practices, with particular attention to the ways that space, place, and community affect writing.

Some book club members also chose to participate in a research study with Meghan, through regular interviews and documentary photography sessions. Meghan is sharing these stories on the Urban Ministries Center blog, and has expanded her definition of how a true sense of community comes about.
“I’ve learned that communities don’t revel in difference and borders, but that communities are inclusive, honor connection, and look for the best in others,” Meghan says.

One community effort that values inclusion and honors connection is the Center City Literary Festival that our English Department presents each year, with our partner UNC Charlotte Center City and with the support of a number of collaborators from campus and the broader community. This festival addresses the cultural needs that are described in UNC Charlotte’s Civic Action Plan, which is a sustainable approach to address the unique needs of the Charlotte area.

This year’s festival will be held on Saturday, March 30 at UNC Charlotte Center City. The two-part festival is open without charge and includes daytime and nighttime events. During the day, we feature children’s authors along with fun activities such as creation stations and scavenger hunts. In the evening, we welcome award-winning authors for a reception, readings, discussion, book signings, and socializing.

Faculty member Bryn Chancellor is one of the main organizers of the festival, along with faculty member Janaka Lewis and staff member Angie Williams. As Bryn describes it, the festival aims to bridge the university and city through the literary arts and to celebrate all the many ways we tell stories.

“Literary events have enormous power: they give us joy, unite us, let us express our shared humanity, and show us how writing and art can sustain us, especially in times of change and upheaval,” she says.

Another community literary festival that brings children, teens and families together with authors and illustrators also shares Dahl’s focus on helping children become readers. As a member of the steering committee for the annual EpicFest literary festival, I take pleasure in seeing children from very different socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds listening to stories together, playing together, and standing in line together to get their faces painted.

Our public library has a long tradition of working with people from all facets of our community, and this approach is reflected in EpicFest’s welcoming attitude. This attitude is probably one reason we always have student, faculty, and staff volunteers from the English Department who are eager to help put on this free festival at ImaginOn each year.

Another event that draws quite the crowd is the annual Seuss-a-thon, which the English Department organizes each year with Park Road Books. This year’s event on Saturday, March 9 celebrates the anniversary of the birth of Theodore Seuss Geisel, also known as Dr. Seuss. Faculty, students, and friends at this free event read from the author’s renowned books for children and provide activities for children.

In a way, the Seuss-a-thon functions as a sort of cultural catalyst. It is brings together people who appreciate imaginative stories, and in the process, it is creates a time and place for people to make their own connections with stories and with each other. Those of us in the English Department at UNC Charlotte believe these are connections well worth making.

Words: Mark West, Chair and Professor, Department of English | Images: Lynn Roberson and Courtesy of the English Department

English student Sara Eudy volunteers at a previous Center City Literary Festival (top photo), while English Department author Janaka Bowman Lewis shares her books.
Culturally Responsive Teaching
Scholars Learn To Help Students See Individual Strengths

Steven Ervin has run the race of a lifetime during his time as a student teacher at Northwest Cabarrus Middle School.

“I went into student teaching with a competitive mindset that I was going to compete against a test, that I need to be the best teacher, and I need to have the highest test scores,” says Ervin, a senior middle grades education major with a concentration in mathematics. “But now, I have faced a competition against something completely different.”

During his student teaching in fall 2018, Ervin worked with a struggling student who talked about dropping out of school when he turned 16, the age when students can legally drop out in almost all North Carolina school systems. Ervin and his mentors at UNC Charlotte and at Northwest Cabarrus Middle School have kept their focus on helping this student and other students understand that they have the staying power to finish the race.

“I know that if we show that we care - that we overwhelmingly care - for our students, I think that goes a long way,” Ervin says. As part of UNC Charlotte’s Culturally Responsive Teaching (CResT) Program, Ervin has been learning how to help his students see their own strengths and how they can build on those to succeed.

“We want our scholars to learn about the rich and diverse resources that the students bring with them when they come to school and how these resources can be tapped to learn math,” says UNC Charlotte professor Anthony Fernandes of the Department of Mathematics and Statistics. “We understand that there are challenges, but we don’t want to constantly focus on the obstacles and ignore the resources.”

Fernandes co-leads the CResT work with Kim Harris, a professor and undergraduate coordinator in the Department of Mathematics and Statistics, and David Pugalee, director of the Center for STEM Education in the Cato College of Education.

“Our scholars learn to see things through the eyes of their students and are challenged by us as their mentors, along with their classroom mentors, to draw
on the lived experiences of their students to design mathematics lessons,” Harris says. “We want them to know the content, and to also understand the context of the students’ lives. This context can affect how the students might approach the content.”

Each CResT cohort consists of eight juniors and seniors who are selected from a pool of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) majors. Once selected, the scholars can choose to obtain certification to teach in middle or high school.

The program offers them scholarships, summer internships, opportunities to present at regional and national conferences, structured experiences in grades 6-12 classrooms, seminars, mentoring by faculty and experienced teachers, and teaching opportunities.

Funding to support the scholars comes from the National Science Foundation’s Robert Noyce Teacher Scholarship Program. The NSF supports this and similar programs across the country, with the goal of encouraging exceptional STEM majors to become K-12 mathematics and science teachers.

In return for the support they receive, the UNC Charlotte scholars pledge to teach two years in high-needs school districts for each year of their scholarships following graduation. High-needs school districts can face high rates of poverty, high teacher turnover rates, and teachers who are instructing outside their disciplines.

The UNC Charlotte scholars do their student teaching in middle and high school classrooms, paired with two or three culturally and linguistically diverse students in those schools. They learn about the students and their experiences, developing a relationship with each student.

“One of the students was saying that after he gets out of class, he goes and works in his uncle’s auto shop until 9 o’clock at night, and then he goes home and takes care of his four younger siblings because both of his parents work the night shift,” says scholar Greg Wolcott, who student taught at Vance High School. “He said, ‘Do you really think that I am going to do homework?’ I can’t even imagine that type of responsibility. It is easy to look at the kid and think he just doesn’t do his homework, and he is just lazy, or doesn’t care.”

Wolcott knows that he will take into his classroom as a fulltime teacher an awareness of the need to connect with each student as an individual. In this case, for example, along with his fatigue and stress, the student brings resilience, persistence, and a strong work ethic, honed by his family responsibilities.

The scholars say they learn from the students in their classrooms, from their UNC Charlotte mentors, from the classroom teachers at their assigned schools, and from each other.

“Coming into our seminars and talking about what we have done and what we each have seen has really helped,” scholar Amanda Smyle says. “It is eye-opening, hearing about the different schools, students, and teachers.”

As mentors, Fernandes, Harris, and Pugalee also seek to connect in an individual way with each of these UNC Charlotte CResT scholars. “Connecting to students is what I am all about, so being here with these students, and seeing them become professional and become teachers, this truly is why I became a math educator,” Harris says.

The UNC Charlotte mentors hope that the CResT scholars will grow into inspired teachers – and continue as learners themselves. “Our goal is to inspire them to be better than where they are currently, to constantly be improving, to be lifelong learners,” Fernandes says. “You want to inspire people to want to do that, not just give them content.”

Words: Cooper Schroeder | Images: Lynn Roberson
At the end of the school day, as he wraps up his clinical experiences at Whitewater Middle School, UNC Charlotte scholar Cameron Wilson huddles with math teacher Vertina M. Rhim ’13. They review what seemed to work for each student – or not – during the day’s lessons.

A junior mathematics major and secondary education minor who is part of the Culturally Responsive Teaching (CResT) program, Wilson draws on Rhim’s wisdom and expertise. They brainstorm how to reach each student in a focused, individualized manner.

“She asked me one time, would I rather be a door or a window,” Wilson says. “That got me thinking. If you are a window, you can only show someone what is on the outside or what is on the other side, but they can’t really interact with what’s there. But if you are a door, they can choose to walk through and go out and interact and be involved. As teachers, speaking metaphorically, we are the doors. We can give them the tools and try to give them the reason to step through that door.”

In the classroom, Wilson scans, alert for students who need help. Students make eye contact, raise a hand, or speak his name. Wilson circulates among the students’ desks, offering just enough clues so they can puzzle out the answers on their own.

“When I first came to UNC Charlotte, I did not have any plans on becoming a teacher,” he says. “However, when I got into the CResT program and read about what it could be, I really gained interest. As soon as I stepped into the classroom in clinicals at Whitewater Middle, I just knew this is what I wanted.”

Rhim, who obtained her teaching certificate and master’s degree in middle grades education from UNC Charlotte’s Cato College of Education, values the opportunity to collaborate with Wilson.

“I would hope that teachers are allowing their mentees or student teachers to have hands-on experiences, not grading papers and being that fallback person,” Rhim says. “That’s not what it’s about. They can’t build that relationship if you don’t let them interact with students, if they don’t work one-on-one with the students.”

This lesson seems to have stuck with Wilson, as he prepares for his career as a teacher. “At the end of the day, that is our job as instructors; to help our students utilize skills, both socially and academically, both in their lives and the bigger world,” he says.

Words and Images: Lynn Roberson
"AS TEACHERS, SPEAKING
METAPHORICALLY, WE ARE THE
DOORS. WE CAN GIVE (STUDENTS)
THE TOOLS AND TRY TO GIVE THEM
THE REASON TO STEP THROUGH
THAT DOOR."

— CAMERON WILSON

Cameron Wilson and his fellow CReST scholars have discovered that informal settings are ideal places to connect with students on a more personal level and build rapport.

Whitewater Middle School mathematics teacher Vertina M. Rhim guides her students and Wilson, as he student teaches.

Cameron Wilson's student teaching duties include escorting students from the cafeteria to the classroom.
Faculty authors in the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences at UNC Charlotte in 2018 edited and published 36 books, including textbooks, research publications, novels, and other forms. Their books contribute to the College’s creation of knowledge.

**Oscar De La Torre**
The People of the River: Nature and Identity in Black Amazonia, 1835–1945
The University of North Carolina Press

**Felecia Carter Harris**
What Color Are Your Jellybeans? Intersections of Generation, Race, Sex, Culture, and Gender
Cognella Academic Publishing

**Tanure Ojaide**
God's Naked Children: Selected and Short Stories
Malthouse Press Limited

**Tanure Ojaide**
The Questioner: New Poems
Kraft Books Limited

**Jonathan Marks**
The Alternative Introduction to Biological Anthropology (2nd Edition)
Oxford University Press

**Edited by Casey Ryan Kelly and Jason Edward Black**
Decolonizing Native American Rhetoric: Communicating Self-Determination
Peter Lang

**Andrew C. Billings and Jason Edward Black**
Mascot Nation: The Controversy Over Native American Representations in Sports
University of Illinois Press

**Christine S. Davis and Deborah C. Breede**
Talking through Death: Communicating about Death in Interpersonal, Mediated, and Cultural Contexts
Routledge

**Edited by Ashli Quesinberry Stokes**
Why Does No One In My Books Look Like Me?: Tobe and Ongoing Questions about Race, Representation, and Identity
University of North Carolina Press

**Edited by Bruce A. Arrigo**
The SAGE Encyclopedia of Surveillance, Security and Privacy
SAGE Publications, Inc.

**Edited by Patricia Bou-Franch and Pilar Garcés-Conejos Blitvich**
Analyzing Digital Discourse: New Insights and Future Directions
Palgrave Macmillan

**Edited by Keisha N. Blain, Christopher Cameron, and Ashley D. Farmer**
New Perspectives on the Black Intellectual Tradition
Northwestern University Press

**Edited by Karen L. Cox and Sarah E. Gardner**
Reassessing the 1930s South
Louisiana State University Press

**Edited by Kirk Melnikoff and Roslyn L. Knutson**
Christopher Marlowe, Theatrical Commerce, and the Book Trade
Cambridge University Press

**Kirk Melnikoff**
Elizabethan Publishing and the Makings of Literary Culture
University of Toronto Press

**Ralf Thiede**
Children’s Books, Brain Development, and Language Acquisition
Routledge

**Edited by Kathy Merlock Jackson and Mark I. West**
Shapers of American Childhood: Essays on Visionaries from L. Frank Baum to Dr. Spock to J.K. Rowling
McFarland & Company, Inc.

**Edited by Barbara M. Cooper, Gary R. Corwin, Tibebe Esthet, Musa A.B. Gaiya, Tim Geysbeek and Shobana Shankar**
Transforming Africa’s Religious Landscapes: The Sudan Interior Mission (SIM), Past and Present
Africa World Press

**Christine Haynes**
Our Friends the Enemies: The Occupation of France After Napoleon
Harvard University Press

**Edited by Shepard W. McKinley and Steven Sabol**
North Carolina’s Experience during the First World War
The University of Tennessee Press

**Peter Thorsheim**
Inventing Pollution: Coal, Smoke, and Culture in Britain since 1800
Ohio University Press
College Authors Add To Knowledge With 2018 Books

Alan Singerman and Michèle Bissière
Contemporary French Cinema: A Student’s Book
Focus

David S. Dalton
Mestizo Modernity: Race, Technology, and the Body in Postrevolutionary Mexico
University of Florida Press

Edited by Concepción B. Godev
Translation, Globalization, and Translocation: The Classroom and Beyond
Palgrave Macmillan

Ann B. González
Postcolonial Approaches to Latin American Children’s Literature
Routledge

Ruth E. Groenhout
Care Ethics and Social Structures in Medicine
Routledge

Mary Jo McGowan Shepherd
Campaign Finance Complexity: Before Campaigning Retain an Attorney
Lexington Books

James Igoe Walsh and Marcus Schulzke
Drones and Support for the Use of Force
University of Michigan Press

Beth Elise Whitaker and John F. Clark
Africa’s International Relations: Balancing Domestic & Global Interests
Lynne Rienner Publishers

John C. Reeves and Annette Yoshiko Reed
Enoch from Antiquity to the Middle Ages, Volume I: Sources from Judaism, Christianity, and Islam
Oxford University Press

Edited by Rosemary L. Hopcroft
The Oxford Handbook of Evolution, Biology, and Society
Oxford University Press

Stephany De Scisciolo and Teresa L. Scheid
Reducing Race Differences in Direct-to-Consumer Pharmaceutical Advertising: The Case for Regulation
Lexington Books

Aaron Kashtan
Between Pen and Pixel: Comics, Materiality, and the Book of the Future
The Ohio State University Press
Charlotte saw a boom of low-cost, single-family subdivisions from the late 1990s until a recession hit in 2007. In a new research article, two scholars with UNC Charlotte ties conclude that many of those subdivisions did not improve life for the lower-income households who moved into what was described as affordable housing.

Instead, the outcomes in these neighborhoods, and the government policies that allowed them, resulted in what researchers Janni Sorensen (shown above) and Melissa Currie call repackaged urban renewal. The research found that the worst choice for the location of new construction starter home neighborhoods is within existing neighborhoods that already face challenges. The new construction not only does not serve as a catalyst for change, it can compound the challenges people and their neighborhoods face.

“A core conclusion of our article is that building suburban-style, cookie-cutter infill in/next to existing low-income neighborhoods is not in itself a sustainable solution to the need for affordable housing or an assurance of urban revitalization,” they say.

Sorensen, an associate professor in the Department of Geography & Earth Sciences, teaches community planning and is Director of UNC Charlotte’s Charlotte Action Research Project. Central to CHARP’s approach is capacity building in and knowledge exchange with residents of under-resourced neighborhoods. Currie earned her doctoral degree from UNC Charlotte in geography and urban regional analysis and is an assistant professor in the Department of Landscape Architecture at Texas Tech University.

Their study, published in the Journal of Urban Affairs, looks at Mecklenburg County single-family-home neighborhoods built between 2000 and 2010 in the bottom third of the local housing stock, which means a maximum sales price of $170,000. The researchers used the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Quality of Life Explorer tool to define and analyze the neighborhoods.

For each of the 80 identified starter-home neighborhoods, they compared median sales prices when the homes were built and the median price of the most recent sales occurring from 2012 through 2014. They looked at neighborhood locations and proximity to undesirable land uses, or LULUs – planner-speak for “locally unwanted land uses.” They found 100 of those land uses, including toxic waste, railroad transfer yards, a salvage yard, big-box stores, interstate or major highways, and high-voltage electrical transmission lines.

The research found:

- A clear pattern indicates that many neighborhoods aimed at lower-income households were built near pre-existing LULUs.
- Of the unstable neighborhoods, 54 percent had been built in industrial locations. Also, 37 percent of unstable neighborhoods were infill development inserted into existing low-income neighborhoods.
- Starter-home neighborhoods built inside the Interstate 485 loop highway had lower median incomes, lower educational attainment, higher densities, higher crime rates, lower rates of homeownership, higher minority populations, and lower home values.
- Those outside I-485 were more stable, even if adjacent to a freeway. They had higher median household incomes, higher proportions of white residents, and lower rates of subsidized housing.

The 80 neighborhoods were rated stable or unstable, based on whether home values by 2014 had, on average, lost less than or more than 15 percent of their initial sales price. Of the neighborhoods, 44 were rated unstable and 36 stable.
Question: What inspired this research?

**Currie:** In environmental justice literature there’s been this debate, the chicken and the egg thing: Which came first, the poor neighborhood or the environmental hazard? With new construction that gives you the answer. The pre-existing industrial uses were already there.

A lot of developers were taking little pockets of leftover land that were super cheap, or brownfields, and in some cases getting rezoning from industrial to residential, to put residential development they knew was going to attract lower-income families.

The decade chosen to study was very purposeful – to take neighborhoods that were as similar as possible and compare their trajectories over time, from 2000-2014, to see how they reacted to the recession. We chose only neighborhoods of single-family detached houses – ones that started at the same price point, in the same county. We compared where they started from and where they were at the end of 2014. If you take things that start off nearly identical, it gives you a sort of natural, built-in experiment where you’re comparing apples to apples.

I used data from the Quality of Life Explorer and looked at the outcomes on a multitude of variables, everything from educational outcomes, income, jobs. We looked at what kinds of LULUs surrounded the different neighborhoods. They were everything from really large-scale industrial, heavy manufacturing to being adjacent to interstates or major highways to overhead electrical lines. I was shocked by how frequently these huge transmission lines were going right through neighborhoods. They’re really an eyesore, very intrusive on a neighborhood.

The neighborhoods were concentrated around all these heavy industrial or manufacturing LULUs. Things like grocery stores and banks were scarce. So you have the dis-amenity, and then you have the lack of positive amenities. It’s a double whammy.

**Sorensen:** We started recognizing that the concentration of LULUs around some of those developments inside the beltway was much higher than for those outside the belt.

**Currie:** It was an obvious pattern, which goes back to our crescent-and-wedge pattern in a lot of respects. [The “wedge” is the pattern of comparative affluence and predominantly white Mecklenburg County neighborhoods in a triangular-shaped area to the south of uptown Charlotte, roughly between Interstate 77 and Independence Boulevard. The “crescent” is the arc west, north and east of that wedge.]

**Sorensen:** With any measure of inequality in Charlotte you see that pattern. It’s segregation racially and by income. The white upper middle class lives in the wedge and by Lake Norman, and people of color and low-income income live in the crescent. Look at any social determinants of upward mobility, school performance, health outcomes, all those measures have that pattern.

**Question.** You call the starter home development “repackaged urban renewal ... islands of suburban-style infill surrounded by decline.” How and why did you come to that conclusion?

**Sorensen:** When we think historically of urban renewal, we think of the destruction of stable neighborhoods, the erasure of black communities, in particular, and pushing people out of stable communities. This is different – but it’s still a disruption of communities of color with an outside intervention that has a negative impact on the existing community.

Very often there’s a narrative that any development in low-income communities is desirable, that the problem is there’s no new investment. But what Melissa’s work demonstrates is that by adding substandard, low-quality, intense development – with little thought about urban design and public spaces – targeted at low-income communities, we are not helping the existing community, we are actually hurting them.

**Currie:** We’re always pushing infill development [developing inside a city instead of on undeveloped land at the edge of town]. Infill is good, we want to do infill because we want to discourage sprawl. But infill just for the sake of infill is not necessarily always good, if you ignore the context. One of the major conclusions is that context matters.

**Question.** In building affordable housing, a major cost is the land. If you buy cheaper land, which may be near LULUs, the housing can be cheaper. That’s what the free market does. If the way to build affordable housing is where land is cheap, and it is cheap because there are LULUs, what could or should government do?

**Sorensen:** This is a reflection of our reluctance to intervene in the free market. There are examples of rezonings happening practically automatically, without questioning the outcomes for the people who live there. And allowing that is a policy position.

In our 2014 study of Windy Ridge, a starter-home neighborhood, one of the things we found was that you’re passing the eventual costs arising from that kind of development along to the taxpayers and the city.

Inclusionary zoning would distribute affordable housing around the community. That’s obviously difficult to implement without political support. [Note: Inclusionary zoning requires a certain percentage of affordable units to be built in each development; state law does not support it.]

**Question:** What could government or other institutions do to break that cycle of unsustainable neighborhoods being built because the land is cheap?

**Currie:** They have to be more careful about where they allow development to happen. It’s not OK to put neighborhoods next to these kinds of LULUs. It shocks me that we’re still doing that in 2018.

**Sorensen:** One of the things we hear a lot about in the older neighborhoods is that it feels like an assault to have housing that does not fit the style and the design of their communities. People are really hurt by change to their community that doesn’t respect the history or the coherent feel of their community. Many low-income communities have very strong histories of being the first places in the city where African Americans could purchase homes.

Continued page 20
and very strong histories of attachment to the neighborhood. When people from the outside come in and build something that doesn’t fit, that doesn’t add positive value, that’s not a just way to allow market forces to disturb and disrupt those communities.

We seem to have this arrogant attitude that people who own homes in lower income communities do not have the strong feelings that people in higher income neighborhoods have about preserving and maintaining the style, the design, the feel of their community. And very often the public engagement process is minimal; there’s not enough effort to bring people out.

Question: The “American Dream” at some point became “buy a house in the suburbs with a white picket fence.” Do you think that played into people’s willingness to buy these starter homes – a single-family house with a yard?

Sorensen: That’s very much true, at least from the work we did in Windy Ridge, where people would use those words and talk about how they would see pictures of the houses online and it felt exactly like the American Dream, and suddenly it was accessible to them. And then – waking up from that dream after they moved into the community – many of the homeowners realized they were surrounded by investors who had bought up these houses to rent them out. We had people talking about loving their home and wishing they could pick it up and move it somewhere else, because the neighborhood was not a good place to live.

Currie: People who had more resources moved out. It’s amazing to see the change in the neighborhoods. There was tremendous white flight. They started out a little more mixed but by the end of 2014 they’re very segregated.

But here you have lower-income families that invested everything they had into becoming a homeowner, and they’re left with a home that has lost all its value. Any equity they put in is gone. If they put their savings in, that’s gone. For those who ended up losing their homes, their credit is wrecked, they’ve gone through foreclosure. On every front, like Janni said, it’s an assault.

Question: If you could wave a magic wand and have the local and state governments change their policies and practices, what would you do?

Sorensen: More regulations to ensure that we have quality, sustainable spaces for people at all income levels. For a lot of people this image of homeownership and the white picket fence is not necessarily the right option. But it can be difficult to find good, affordable rental housing that can provide a good, stable environment to raise your family. The other piece is a much stronger public engagement process in planning, and with that, much more intentional consideration around things like rezoning.

Currie: For me the magic wand thing would be the quality of space. People and families who live in lower-income space are not less deserving of a playground than someone who lives in Mint Hill. I can draw from my own personal experience. I lived in subsidized housing for six years when I was raising my kids. We lived next to a huge quarry, a land pit. We had to drive through LULUs to get to our neighborhood. I was working fulltime, and my kids deserved a place to play just as much as anybody else’s kids.

It adds to the burden of just trying to survive in poverty when you’re surrounded by total blight and disinvestment. It weighs on you in a way that is hard to put into words. You work all day and you come home, and you’ve got all of these difficult issues in your life, and there’s no place to take your kids outside and relax and try to let those things go. I feel like a lot of the solution lies in the design of neighborhoods. Don’t put them by LULUs. And include quality spaces.

Question: Developers would say that makes them more expensive; what are your thoughts?

Currie: The research shows it doesn’t. The neighborhoods we looked at that were in Huntersville or outside the loop – which started off at the same price point as those inside the loop and because of form-based codes or other things were required to put in street trees or tot lots or sidewalks – those houses started at the same price point as the houses in Windy Ridge and other neighborhoods like Windy Ridge. For developers or city officials to say we can’t afford to make developers do that, well, we can just say that the research does not bear that out.

This article originally appeared in UNC Charlotte Urban Institute publications.

Words: Mary Newsom | Images: Lynn Roberson | Map: Melissa Currie
James Martin Middle School science club members conduct experiments, working with UNC Charlotte chemistry professor Tom Schmedake in his research lab.

The James Martin Middle School science club members swarmed into UNC Charlotte chemistry professor Tom Schmedake’s research lab. There, waiting for the scholars with Schmedake, were nanoscale science doctoral student Margaret Kocherga and Scott Gartlan, executive director of the Charlotte Teachers Institute.

Throughout the day, the students worked in teams conducting experiments, writing up their observations and predictions, and learning from the researchers. Their visit was part of a partnership that CTI fostered, in which the UNC Charlotte researchers share their scientific methods and career observations with the students and their teachers.

“Finding ways for students and teachers in high-needs schools to gain access and exposure to research skills and expertise, such as those found at UNC Charlotte, can change lives,” Gartlan says. “These opportunities allow students to gain confidence and knowledge, so they can envision that college and perhaps a scientific career can be part of their future.”

This is just one example of how CTI contributes to economic mobility, social mobility, and quality of life in Charlotte-Mecklenburg. CTI is an educational partnership among Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, UNC Charlotte, and Johnson C. Smith University that works to improve teaching in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. CTI is housed in the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences at UNC Charlotte.

In its cornerstone work, CTI empowers CMS teachers to transform themselves and their teaching by creating original curricula in intensive, interdisciplinary seminars during seven-month fellowships with expert professors. Since 2009, CTI has offered 76 seminars for 500 Prekindergarten through 12th grade CMS teachers who have created nearly 800 original curriculum units for more than 113,000 local students.

In 2019, CTI is offering eight culturally-relevant seminars on topics including white privilege, human biology, childhood in literature, climate science, Africa, writing in mathematics, children in war and conflict, and time travel using music. In 2018, seminars included human rights, insights into Latino communities in Charlotte, and epigenetics as a way to explore social justice, among others.

In another key initiative, the CTI Summer Research Experience for Teachers focuses on development of research and communication skills for CMS teachers, including from high-needs schools. Teachers join existing research teams, working with professors, graduate students, and undergraduate students to advance the research agenda while honing research skills to bring back to their classrooms. So far, 41 teachers have participated and presented their research at UNC Charlotte’s Summer Research Symposium.

In another effort, CTI hosted a Legacy of Lynching workshop for CMS teachers, presented by the Equal Justice Initiative of Montgomery, AL. Inspired by the workshop, former CTI Fellow and East Mecklenburg High history teacher Larry Bosc organized a trip by 26 CMS teachers to the Initiative’s new Legacy Museum and national memorial to victims of lynching. The trip was supported by Charlotte Teachers Institute, and also by Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools’ offices of diversity and inclusion, and learning and leadership development. Teachers use what they learn to develop new lessons for their students. They will present their work at the 2019 National Council on Black Studies Conference in New Orleans.

Words and Images: Lynn Roberson

James Martin Middle School science club members conduct experiments, working with UNC Charlotte chemistry professor Tom Schmedake in his research lab.
A new collaborative effort called the Bridges to Baccalaureate Program is designed to help students at UNC Charlotte, Gaston College, and Rowan-Cabarrus Community College complete undergraduate biomedical degrees and, ultimately, succeed in biomedical careers.

The initiative is made possible through support from the National Institutes of Health, with funding expected to total $1.37 million over five years. The program will work with a total of 45 students who will earn their associate degrees at Gaston College or Rowan-Cabarrus Community College before transferring to UNC Charlotte to complete their bachelor’s of science degrees in the biomedical sciences.

The program builds upon a strong existing partnership among the three campuses, which in spring 2018 announced funding from the National Science Foundation for the SPARC4, or STEM Persistence and Retention via Curricula, Centralization, Cohorts, and Collaboration Project.

“STUDENTS WHO ENTER COLLEGE WITH ASPIRATIONS FOR BIOMEDICAL CAREERS SOMETIMES LACK THE UNDERSTANDING OF, AND PREPARATION FOR, THE PROCESSES OF SCIENCE. WORKING TOGETHER, WE WANT TO ADDRESS THE GAPS SO STUDENTS CAN SUCCEED.”

— CHRISTINE RICHARDSON

“It is exciting to further the work we are doing together,” says Bridges to Baccalaureate Program Director Christine Richardson, who is a professor in the Department of Biological Sciences at UNC Charlotte. “Students who enter college with aspirations for biomedical careers sometimes lack the understanding of, and preparation for, the processes of science. Working together, we want to address the gaps so students can succeed.”

The three partners anticipate sharing educational best practices that have been developed or improved during the two projects. While they are not the same, the projects will complement each other.

“We are thrilled to once again partner with UNC Charlotte in a program that will benefit STEM students,” says Ashley Hagler, who is the SPARC director, as well as director of undergraduate research/biology coordinator, at Gaston College. “This is an excellent opportunity for students who are interested in biomedical sciences to explore a career in research, and to experience a one-on-one mentoring relationship with a faculty member at Gaston before they transfer to UNC Charlotte.”

The Bridges to Baccalaureate Program will focus on exposing students to targeted resources and experiences.

“This grant gives our students an exciting opportunity to get real world research experience. This experience will not only help students support themselves financially, but it will also give them a unique relationship with faculty in a lab setting. Students will quickly learn if a biomedical career is for them,” says Dr. Carol Scherczinger, dean of arts and sciences at Rowan-Cabarrus Community College.

The partnership includes three areas of emphasis, following what is commonly called a Guided Pathway to Success model.

First, students will receive intensive academic advising while using “degree maps” to help them chart their academic course. They also will experience individualized mentorship, cohort learning, and embedded course tutoring at the community college and university institutions.

Second, students will conduct independent research projects with faculty at the community college and later at UNC Charlotte. Research at UNC Charlotte will include both summer and academic term independent research in a laboratory, conducting cutting-edge biomedical sciences research. These experiences will culminate in poster and oral presentations both on campus and at national scientific meetings as well as opportunities to publish in peer-reviewed journals.

Third, to promote a sense of inclusion and understanding of how biomedical sciences fit in the broader community context, transfer students will be paired with senior student mentors at the university level, attend regional networking events for biomedical professionals, participate in professional development workshops, and take courses in bioethics.

Recruitment of students will include a focus on increasing the numbers of students from underrepresented groups in STEM into the biological and biomedical sciences majors. These would consist of underrepresented ethnic and racial groups, women, people with disabilities, and those from rural areas with low incomes.

The regional project is expected to contribute to the nationwide conversation around the issue of what helps – or hinders – community college students as they strive for careers in STEM fields, particularly in the life sciences. Each year, UNC Charlotte welcomes more community college transfers than any other North Carolina college or university.

Collaborators at each institution include faculty from diverse disciplines, as well as institutional leadership. At UNC Charlotte partners include the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences, the College of Health and Human Services, J. Murrey Atkins Library, and the University Transfer Center, which is a resource for transfer students. Faculty participants and lab resources also come from other colleges, including the Lee College of Engineering and the College of Computing and Informatics.

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News Briefs

1. Eppes Conducts Research In One Of Earth’s Coldest, Driest Places

Antarctica’s McMurdo Dry Valleys region is one of the coldest, driest, and windiest places on the planet. Temperatures in this area can plunge to 58 degrees below zero. Its deposits and landforms contain records of past climate not accessible elsewhere in the world. With its characteristics, scientists commonly use Antarctica data as an analog for the surface of Mars.

Antarctica’s unique climate enticed UNC Charlotte earth sciences researcher Martha Cary Eppes and her research colleagues to spend weeks camping out in a tent in the sub-zero temperatures, in order to – literally – listen to rocks as they fracture.

Eppes has just returned to UNC Charlotte from Beacon Valley, Antarctica and is now poring through photographs and data collected during the extreme explorations, funded by the National Science Foundation Office of Polar Programs.

Studying how rocks break down is important to more accurately understand the paleoclimates and landscapes of Antarctica, elsewhere on Earth, and possibly even Mars. Measurements on the samples gathered will allow the researchers to see how quickly rocks break down and how their characteristics change over geologic time.

Eppes, principal investigator Jennifer Lamp of Columbia University, and consultant Kate Swanger of University of Massachusetts Lowell in late November arrived at the McMurdo Station, which is the logistics hub of the U.S. Antarctic Program.

A week after their arrival, a helicopter transported the 3-woman research team from McMurdo Station to their isolated field camp in Beacon Valley, where they camped for nearly a month. From their rustic camp, the research team instrumented boulders with sensors that acted as miniature seismographs, recording even the smallest microcracking on and within the rocks.

In addition to instrumentation, the team collected samples.

Back at UNC Charlotte, Eppes will bring the research into her classroom, using what she is learning as real-world examples. Future graduate students will help to analyze the data and the rock samples that will arrive back from Antarctica by boat sometime in April.

2. Lewis Selected For Summer Residency at National Humanities Center

UNC Charlotte Associate Professor of English Janaka Bowman Lewis will spend four weeks this summer in residency at the National Humanities Center in the Research Triangle Park, working on a project about “Black Girlhood and the Power of Belonging.” Lewis will join a select group of about 40 scholars from across the nation who have been chosen to do research in residency at the Center.

While at the Center, Lewis will use literature and media to complete a chapter from the monograph on which she currently is working, which is called “Black Girlhood and Narratives of Play.”

The chapter on which she will work during the summer residency discusses how messages of black power reached Black children, and girls in particular, and also how African American women authors created and revealed their own sources of power by representation of their own or others’ Black girlhood.

The monograph focuses on the significance of representations of African American girls and social engagement in literature, and argues that this self-recognition from the perspective of the narrator begins in childhood as the girls represent play as social interaction, from Harriet Jacobs in the 1830s, who is represented in her 1861 narrative Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, to Starr Carter in Angie Thomas’ 2017 novel The Hate U Give.

Lewis is an associate professor of English, Director of the Women’s and Gender Studies program, and faculty affiliate in the Department of Africana Studies. She teaches courses on 19th and 20th century African American women’s literature and African American archival and material culture.
Tanure Ojaide, Frank Porter Graham Professor of Africana Studies at UNC Charlotte, is co-recipient of the 2018 Wole Soyinka Prize for Literature in Africa for his book, Songs of Myself.

This year’s competition had 110 submissions from 11 countries, including Uganda, Kenya, South Africa, Nigeria, and Rwanda. Soyinka presented the prize on December 9, 2018 in Lagos, Nigeria at a gala attended by numerous African literati. The Lumina Foundation established the prize in 2005 in honor of Soyinka, Africa’s first Nobel Laureate in literature.

“Songs of Myself: Quartet is deeply rooted in the indigenous African poetic transition,” Ojaide wrote in the foreword of his book. “The great udje poets first composed songs paying tribute to the god of songs, followed by songs of self-exhortation, and then songs mocking themselves before satirizing others. This collection incorporates some of these aspects of the oral poetic genre in its four-part structure.”

Ojaide shared the prize with Ugandan Harriet Anena, who was honored for “A Nation in Labour.” Each received a $10,000 cash prize, medal and trophy.

Three College faculty have received Fulbright awards this academic year. They are Elizabeth Miller of English, Gregory Mixon of History, and Adalira Saenz-Ludlow of Mathematics and Statistics.

Saenz-Ludlow’s work at Universidad Distrital Francisco Jose’ de Caldas in Colombia contributes to the ongoing and progressive research in mathematics education in Colombia. Specifically, she is collaborating on data analysis, the design of teaching and learning environments for underrepresented Colombian populations, and advising doctoral students.

Miller’s work includes research at the University of Cologne in Cologne (Köln), Germany, with the intent of creating a clearer understanding of the fundamental role of emotions in language teacher practice and professionalization. This effort will build on her research on emotions and emotional labor among English language teachers.

Mixon’s project includes research and teaching at an institution in Canada. He is doing a comparative study of African descendant militiamen in North Carolina and South Carolina following the Civil War in the United States. His work in Canada is intended to help expand his knowledge of the history of African descendant people outside the United States, and to share his knowledge of blacks in the United States.

The Fulbright Program is the U.S. government’s flagship international exchange program and is supported by the people of the United States and partner countries around the world.

Taking precautions, such as getting proper immunizations, can help prevent the spread of the flu - a dangerous and at times deadly disease. October 2018 marked the 100th anniversary of the Influenza Epidemic (Spanish Flu) of 1918 in North Carolina, with a new study offering lessons from the historic event.

Lauren Austin, who recently earned her public policy doctoral degree and master’s degree in history from UNC Charlotte, researched this century-ago influenza pandemic, which left citizens “afraid to breathe,” as she describes it. Her research with co-author William P. Brandon appears in the book, “North Carolina’s Experience during the First World War,” (The University of Tennessee Press), which was co-edited by UNC Charlotte history professors Shepherd W. McKinley and Steven Sabol. Brandon is Emeritus MMF Distinguished Professor of Health Policy at UNC Charlotte.

Austin, whose dissertation formed the foundation for the book chapter, focused on the experiences of the pandemic at the state level, the county level and the individual level. She created a new database, which will help other researchers more effectively study the pandemic. No such database exists for any other state, Brandon says.

This deadly flu epidemic has continued to play a role in determining modern responses to the threats of “swine flu,” Zika, and other infectious diseases up to the present day, he says.
Two faculty members in the Department of Mathematics and Statistics, Xingjie (Helen) Li and Kevin McGoff, have each received a Faculty Early Career Development (CAREER) award from the National Science Foundation (NSF). CAREER awards are among the most prestigious in support of early-career faculty.

With her five-year funding, which is expected to total $400,000, Li will focus on the development of a new and quantitative coupling framework for defective 2D systems. The wide range of properties from 2D materials pose a unique challenge for mathematical modeling and computation. The overarching goal of this project is to develop constitutive mathematical models and corresponding high order numerical schemes for the deformation of 2D materials with provable performance.

With his five-year funding, which is anticipated to total $419,367, McGoff will analyze dynamical systems, specifically addressing the two interrelated questions of how typical dynamical systems behave, and what can be learned from observations of a dynamical system or group action. The theoretical tools produced by this research will be of broad use in informing the inferential methodology in fields such as geometric morphometrics, shape analysis, and systems biology and could therefore advance understanding of important biological processes.

The CAREER Program supports early-career faculty who have the potential to serve as academic role models in research and education and to lead advances in the mission of their organizations.

In addition to the research outcomes, McGoff’s project is expected to contribute to the education of students ranging from middle school to university graduate level. He will work with students from the Pre-College STEM Program at the UNC Charlotte Center for STEM Education. Additionally, the K-12 engagement activities will be disseminated to teachers through workshops and professional development.

Li’s work will provide research opportunities for graduate and undergraduate students. She also plans to initiate a new Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics / Association for Women In Mathematics chapter and organize departmental colloquium for students. She will organize an outreach program for science and mathematics education annually in the Carolina region, and she plans to organize an AWM Research Symposium.

Kevin McGoff (left) and Helen Li have received CAREER awards from the National Science Foundation.

Men hold nearly all primary breadwinning positions in top income households, and the glass ceiling that has hindered women’s advancement in the workplace is more extensive than previously thought, a new study by UNC Charlotte researcher Jill Yavorsky and colleagues finds.

“Our results indicate that men control the majority of income resources in households in the top one percent of U.S. income distributions,” Yavorsky says. “This matters because members in the one percent possess a great deal of political, economic, and social power and influence in our society. If men are primarily the ones who control these resources, it is likely that men, not women, exercise the majority of power and influence that comes with being in these households.”

The study, “Women in the One Percent: Gender Dynamics in Top Income Positions,” is featured in the February issue of American Sociological Review, the flagship journal of the American Sociological Association. Yavorsky is an assistant professor in the Sociology Department and Organizational Science doctoral program at UNC Charlotte. Her co-authors are Lisa Keister of Duke University, Yue Qian of University of British Columbia, and Michael Nau of The Ohio State University.

This new study shows that women’s income alone is sufficient for one percent status in only 5 percent of all elite households. Moreover, women’s income is necessary in pushing a household over the one percent threshold in only 15 percent of all one percent households. In other words, women’s income is largely inconsequential in most of these households for obtaining one percent status.

The study also indicates that women’s progress on this issue has stalled and women are no closer to earning elite-level income today than they were two decades ago.
Members of the UNC Charlotte and broader community find opportunities to learn in the UNC Charlotte Botanical Gardens, including these students from an English class. While contributions are welcome, admission to the Botanical Gardens and the McMillan Greenhouse is always free. Learn more: gardens.uncc.edu