

2022-2023

CAROLINA COVENANT IMPACT REPORT



THE UNIVERSITY
of NORTH CAROLINA
at CHAPEL HILL



A LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

This past spring, the Carolina Covenant held its first formal celebration for graduating seniors. As I looked across the Carolina Inn ballroom at our graduates, I felt a tremendous sense of pride. There are few experiences more gratifying than being part of someone's developmental journey and witnessing the culmination of their efforts, and our graduation ceremony magnified that feeling. Several graduates pulled me aside to express gratitude, noting that Carolina and the opportunities they have are only possible because of the Covenant. Celebrating this milestone with the first class I welcomed when I started as director in 2019 is a moment I will never forget.

As a friend to our program, you are part of these moments, too. I invite you to share in our excitement about the growth of our Carolina Covenant alumni engagement and career development initiatives. I share with you the strength of our community connections and targeted partnerships for mentoring and well-being. I welcome you to imagine the dozens of Carolina Covenant t-shirts, stickers, water bottles and email signatures that we see scattered across our Tar Heel landscape each day. Please know that this visibility evidences our students' sense of belonging and sense of support at our University. Your support makes these experiences possible.

As I move into my fifth year leading this program, I can confirm that my appreciation and enthusiasm for this work only grow stronger. We are looking



forward to the 20th anniversary of the Covenant in 2024 and engaging in strategic planning for the future. We are working with key collaborators to develop a data-informed roadmap to provide the highest quality support in the most critical areas of need for our current scholars and those deep in the pipeline to Carolina. I look forward to sharing updates with you as we move forward. Thank you in advance for joining us on this path and for helping us ensure that our Covenant is one we enhance and keep for generations to come.

Sincerely and with gratitude,

Candice Powell '06, '21 (PhD)
Director of the Carolina Covenant

Since 2004, the Carolina Covenant — UNC-Chapel Hill's groundbreaking program for students from low-income families — has supported more than **10,000** scholars, providing an opportunity to graduate debt-free through scholarships, work-study and grants. The Carolina Covenant also provides students with support and resources to help them thrive on campus and beyond.

Carolina Covenant Scholars, like all Carolina students, are admitted before ever being assessed for financial need. They represent some of the brightest students in North Carolina and the country.



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CAROLINA_COVENANT

CAROLINA COVENANT QUICK FACTS


10%

of all undergraduates are
COVENANT SCHOLARS*



Since 2004, the **FOUR-YEAR GRADUATION RATE** of Covenant Scholars has **INCREASED** by more than


40%

50%

of Carolina Covenant Scholars are
FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS*

**Numbers are approximate*



CULTIVATING COMMUNITY

Through opportunities provided by the Carolina Covenant, Nya Smythe gained hands-on experiences that informed her career goals.

Carolina Covenant Scholar Nya Smythe '24 is a force in the Carolina community and wants to continue having an impact after graduation. From extracurriculars to her internship to her academic studies, Smythe is a diligent and focused scholar who emphasizes the importance of culture and community.

She took her first anthropology course as a sophomore in high school, and in May 2024 she will graduate from Carolina with a major in anthropology.

Now Smythe dreams of being a conduit for people's voices, giving them the space and opportunity to share how they feel and voice their opinions. After graduating, Smythe hopes to work collecting oral histories and building community archives. She also hopes to continue growing her hard skills, such as working with more audio equipment, transcribing interviews and learning to be more specialized in podcasting. Through opportunities provided by the Carolina Covenant, she has already garnered crucial experiences that will help her reach those career goals.

"It's not just about the money the Carolina Covenant provides," she said. "It's also about the opportunities that come from being a Carolina Covenant Scholar that make it so worthwhile."

Smythe had an incredible internship in summer 2023. From June through August, she worked as a public history fellow at the Marian Cheek Jackson Center in Chapel Hill.

"I've done a range of things in my role as a public history fellow, and I'm just really proud of my work."

NYA SMYTHE '24

The center is a partner of the Covenant Career Accelerator Program. During her internship, she researched the importance of Black educators in three predominantly Black neighborhoods, and she conducted interviews with important educators in the community.

"I've done a range of things in my role as a public history fellow, and I'm just really proud of my work," Smythe said.

Another vital experience in Smythe's journey was her contributions to the Descendants Project at Carolina, which aims to uncover the complete stories of victims of lynchings, their legacies and their descendants. Students learn to conduct digital historical research that has an impact in the present day, and their research leads them into local communities to conduct interviews with the descendants of those victims. Interviews are preserved in UNC's Wilson Library as an oral history archive.

Smythe stressed that she wouldn't have been able to contribute to that project without her Carolina Covenant mentor Ron Strauss, a professor with joint appointments in dentistry, social medicine and public health, who made her aware of the opportunity after she expressed interest.

Smythe is grateful for all the guidance she's received during her time at Carolina, and support from the Carolina Covenant mentor initiative has been extremely important in encouraging her career path. She loves that the advice she's received is not just advice, it's options. Her mentors don't want to limit her to one track.

"If I express an interest, that usually opens up a bigger conversation about how I can pursue that interest, what avenues are awaiting me and the requirements needed. They want to make sure that if I'm interested in something, I'm a good fit for it," Symthe said.

Smythe said the Carolina Covenant empowered her to do so much for herself. "I want to say thank you to those who support Carolina Covenant students. We're top-tier students, and I'm grateful for their support in our journeys to be great Tar Heels." 🌈

CAROLINA COVENANT QUICK FACTS



DOZENS

**OF FACULTY AND STAFF
MENTORS** currently support
and guide Covenant Scholars



NEARLY

80%

of Carolina Covenant alumni
have **ENROLLED IN
GRADUATE SCHOOL**



MORE THAN

30%

of Carolina Covenant
alumni have **COMPLETED
GRADUATE DEGREES.**

FOLLOWING THE NARRATIVE

A Carolina Covenant Scholar pursued career-enhancing experiences through the Career Accelerator Program.

Upon graduation, Sonny Griffith '23 had his sights set on medical school with the eventual goal of working in rural family medicine. But Griffith didn't follow the traditional pre-med trajectory of majoring in chemistry or biology. Instead, he "followed the narrative" and majored in English with a concentration in science, medicine and literature.

"Originally, I planned on majoring in chemistry, but as I started taking those courses, I felt that humanities, in general, have something that a STEM major might not give a person," he said. "In the back of my mind, I've always had an interest in addiction and the medicine of addiction. When I was taking STEM classes, I felt like I was missing the narrative. I was learning the science itself, but not much about the history of medicine or how to understand the narrative."

That interest in the narrative led Griffith to explore science, medicine and literature as a concentration because it combined his interests and provided a strong foundation for what he might otherwise have missed as a STEM major.

In addition to pursuing this concentration, Griffith spent the summer of 2022 taking part in the Carolina Covenant Career Accelerator Program. The program is designed to guide and support Carolina Covenant Scholars in accessing the social networks, skills and experiences they need to be successful in competitive career fields. Students can access special funding for meaningful, career-enhancing experiences over the summer. A grant from Strada Education Network provided initial funding to the Carolina Covenant in the summer of 2022. Griffith was one of 63 students to benefit from these funds.

Griffith spent the summer pursuing his own research, examining the parallels of addiction as represented in 19th-century British literature and its connection to the Appalachian region. As part of this research, Griffith sought to find out what it meant to be classified as an "addict" during that time frame.



“That summer really pushed me to meet a lot of new people who specialize in the areas that I’m interested in for my research and future career. It definitely improved my communications skills, and I think it made me a better person in general.”

SONNY GRIFFITH '23

Griffith was able to travel for his studies: to the University of Kentucky to conduct archival research through primary sources; to history museums in Asheville, North Carolina; and to attend a conference in Washington, D.C., about treatments for opioid addiction.

“The Career Accelerator Program gave me the means to sustain myself while conducting my research,” said Griffith. “It’s given me the opportunity to travel and network that I wouldn’t have had otherwise.”

One of the biggest findings in Griffith’s research was the role that religion played in the moral ground behind addiction.

“Typically, addiction is characterized as, ‘Because this person is suffering from addiction, that must mean there’s some sort of moral problem’,” he noted. “I grew up in the Appalachian region, and religion is such a big part of life there. I’m dealing with how to combine and balance belief and science in a way that’s beneficial to combating addiction.”

The summer experience opened Griffith’s eyes to ongoing issues in rural areas of the United States, not just Appalachia, and affirmed his desire to work in rural family medicine. That wasn’t the only benefit of the program though.

“I never had much networking experience prior to the Career Accelerator Program,” Griffith said. “That summer really pushed me to meet a lot of new people who specialize in the areas that I’m interested in for my research and future career. It definitely improved my communications skills, and I think it made me a better person in general.” 🌤️



"I felt like I could be an advocate for women in a space that is deeply personal and private. I was very interested in rural health care and access in North Carolina."

ALISA EANES '08, '15 (MD)

"I went from being constantly stressed about financial planning and dedicating all my time to making enough money to pay for my needs to being able to actually engage in campus life."

Eanes said she hadn't considered medicine as a career path until she came to Chapel Hill. Her work-study position was in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at UNC Hospitals, and Covenant Scholars have access to mentoring, academic and personal support services. The late Charlie van der Horst, former professor of medicine and internationally renowned HIV researcher, was one of Eanes' mentors.

"Having someone in the field look at me and tell me that I was capable gave me the confidence to pursue medicine. He helped me navigate the MCAT, the pre-requisites, the volunteering — all the important steps that are hard to figure out without inside knowledge."

After double-majoring in women's studies and psychology and minoring in chemistry, Eanes enrolled in medical school at Carolina. Her OB-GYN rotations solidified her career path. "I felt like I could be an advocate for women in a space that is deeply personal and private," she said. "I was very interested in rural health care and access in North Carolina."

Today, Eanes works with two other OB-GYNs and three midwives at Mission Hospital McDowell. She sees patients for routine prenatal and gynecological care, and she's on call every three days, delivering babies. She and her team deliver more than 300 babies a year!

"Most of my patients are born and raised and stay right here in McDowell County," she said. "It's a tight-knit community that's been here a long time, and it feels really cool to be able to provide excellent care within my rural practice setting. Rural hospitals around the country have been closing, mostly due to financial issues, but ours is thriving. To be part of that feels like an exception, and it's exciting." 🌈

FROM CAROLINA TO SUCCESS

Rural OB-GYN got her start as a Carolina Covenant Scholar.

Alisa Eanes '08, '15 (MD) wanted her career to serve a need. "There are so few rural physicians and very few rural OB-GYNs," she said. "Marion felt like a place where I could pursue my passion but also provide a big service to North Carolinians."

Eanes' decision to pursue rural medicine spurred from her experience at Carolina and her gratitude to those who supported her along the way. "The Carolina Covenant made such a big difference in my life," she said. "I wanted to give that back."

Eanes started her college studies at UNC Wilmington but soon made the decision to transfer to UNC-Chapel Hill. At the time, Eanes knew nothing about the Carolina Covenant, which had only just launched in 2004.



'CAROLINA GAVE ME SO MUCH'

Carolina alum endowed a scholarship through the Carolina Covenant.

"When I think about my purpose, I think about the idea of creating a legacy of helping to lay a pathway for others to follow, to support others and to be able to make it a little bit easier for someone to achieve the type of success that I've achieved."

Ilana Finley '00 is creating her own Tar Heel legacy by endowing a scholarship through the Carolina Covenant.

After graduating with a bachelor's in journalism, Finley took an opportunity to head to the West Coast. What started as an internship at Nike led to her becoming vice president of global communications and social impact for Converse.

As a native of Washington, D.C., she thought Portland, Oregon, would only have her for a few months, but at the end of the summer of 2000, she applied as the executive assistant to the communications director of North America

"When I think about my purpose, I think about the idea of creating a legacy of helping to lay a pathway for others to follow, to support others and to be able to make it a little bit easier for someone to achieve the type of success that I've achieved."

ILANA FINLEY '00

at Nike. Her manager encouraged her to use the role to get her foot in the door. It turned out to be the perfect passage for advancement — little did she know that job would propel her to a successful career.

"That was 23 years ago. I'm still with the same company today and now focus specifically on the Converse brand as a part of the Nike Incorporated portfolio," Finley said. "It set me up for a powerful career in the company."

While Finley was studying journalism at Carolina, she felt that as a student-athlete on the track and field team, she was incredibly supported by the University.

"The University provided incredible resources and support to ensure that I was able to achieve both academic and athletic excellence, which I just really appreciated."

Finley went to UNC-Chapel Hill with the help of student aid so she understands the incredible importance that additional student aid, loans and grants can play in supporting the financial future or the financial opportunity for students to attend school.

"After learning about the Carolina Covenant, I really appreciated the important role that scholarships can play," Finley said.

Now back on the East Coast, in Boston, Finley is excited to stay better connected to her alma mater through philanthropy and service. She is supporting the Carolina Covenant in multiple capacities, and joined the UNC-Chapel Hill Board of Visitors. Her service started in October 2023.

"Carolina gave me so much; I am happy to be able to do something that gives back in a way that is a sign of my gratitude, my experience and what being at UNC did for me." 🌈



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