



2021-2022

*Carolina
Covenant*
**IMPACT
REPORT**



THE UNIVERSITY
of NORTH CAROLINA
at CHAPEL HILL

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The Fruits Of Our Efforts

A LETTER FROM CANDICE POWELL,
The Director of Carolina Covenant

In my last letter to you, I shared our efforts to grow networks of opportunity and connections for Carolina Covenant Scholars. Today, I write to share the fruits of these efforts, and wow — I couldn't be prouder of what we've done together with your support.

With support from our chancellor, senior administration and many campus partners, we've developed the Connecting Carolina's Covenant Scholars (CCCS) initiative into a robust system of professional development support for our students. The CCCS initiative includes our mentors, our liaisons at the professional schools, our alumni, and our Career Accelerator Program. In just over a year, we've grown our Alumni Advocate network of former Carolina Covenant Scholars who are now professionals and graduate students to more than 100 individuals. We were also awarded a \$250,000 grant from Strada Education Network — the Beyond Completion grant — to help our students engage in high-impact professional development experiences over the summer of 2022. With these funds, we helped more than 60 Covenant Scholars access internships, research assistantships, service and shadowing opportunities, and career-related courses that will take them closer to their professional goals. We also completed the first research study on enrolled Covenant Scholars' experiences and perspectives — the Covenant Voices Study. Taken together, we know so much more about what our students need and can plan our next steps to meet these needs.

The Carolina Covenant has done an incredible job of helping low-income students enroll and graduate from college. Still, our Covenant Voices Study and national data remind us that barriers to career development and other opportunities still exist for low-income students



even when they receive significant financial aid. As a national model for low-income student success, the Carolina Covenant not only has the responsibility to help our students thrive in college. We must also equip Covenant Scholars with the relationships, experiences, and skills to compete and thrive beyond degree completion. When Covenant Scholars walk into their next chapter after Carolina, we want them to realize all the benefits and promises of their experience and of the Tar Heel network. The Connecting Carolina's Covenant Scholars initiative is our strategy, and you — our friends and supporters — help give that strategy momentum.

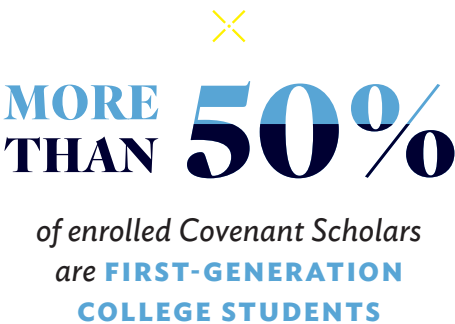
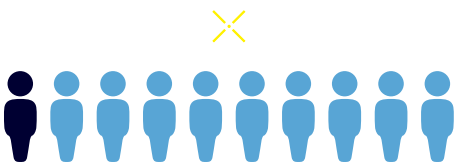
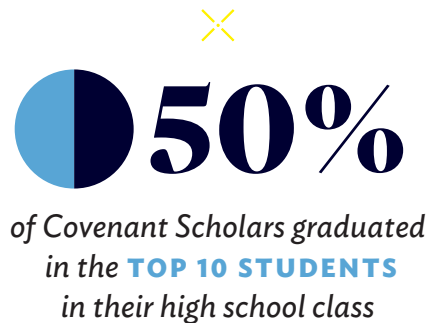
I want to thank Rick and Leah Margerison, who are among the first to give strategically toward CCCS goals. With Rick and Leah's support, we will hire the first full-time, professional position focused on Carolina Covenant Scholars' career development and outcomes. This will allow us to build out our Career Accelerator Program and summer opportunities and provide more Carolina alumni venues to share their professional wisdom and networks of opportunity with Carolina Covenant Scholars.

We are laser-focused on building this next chapter of the Carolina Covenant Scholars Program. I hope the stories highlighted in this report will inspire and excite you as they have inspired me. We must continue our work to ensure that income and social class are not barriers for talented students to achieve their goals, maximize the promise of a Carolina education, and change the world. As we continue developing these efforts and our strategic plan for the Carolina Covenant, I hope you will be part of our journey.

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
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Where I'm Meant To Be

ALEX ACOSTA '24

A native of Hendersonville, North Carolina, Alex Acosta '24 had two main goals after high school: 1) get a good education, and 2) don't go into debt for that education.

The third of four children, Acosta had his heart set on Carolina after his oldest brother, Luis '17, attended UNC. "My brother had nothing but good experiences in Chapel Hill," Acosta said. "He told me it was hard and challenging, but that was what I wanted, because my entire life, I'd worked hard in advanced classes. I knew that Carolina was where I wanted to be."

When Acosta learned he — just like his brother — would be in the Carolina Covenant, the entire household celebrated.

"My first thought was, 'Oh, snap!'" Acosta laughed. "I got home and told my parents, and we celebrated together, and then we called my brother, and he celebrated with us! It was a good moment."

"My parents don't make enough money to pay for my college out of pocket," he continued. "I didn't have anything to fall back on, so for me, it was either community college or no college at all. If it weren't for the Carolina Covenant and the donors who support it, a great university education wouldn't be on the table for me at all."

Majoring in environmental health sciences with a minor in creative writing, Acosta was drawn to the field of public health because of its encompassing nature.

"Public health seemed more well-rounded than the other options I was considering," he recalled. "When I found out I got into the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health, I wanted to continue on that path."

Acosta is active in the Rural Medicine Pathway Program, which is composed of Covenant Scholars from underserved rural populations who want to make a lasting impact in rural North Carolina health care. He is also a participant in the MacDonald Community Service Scholars program — meaning he'll receive training, mentorship and support in pursuing his public service interests. And during his sophomore year at Carolina, he was a member of the Carolina Covenant Student Advisory Council.

"The council was very collaborative, and we got to work directly with the Covenant team to plan events for students and talk about ways to make the Covenant program better," shared Acosta.

In his spare time, Acosta said he loves to read, write and think. "Most people who know me probably think I'm just this goofy guy," he said. "I'm always making jokes. But, they don't really know that I make a point to take an hour out of my day to just think and write."

Upon graduation, Acosta hopes to become a pediatrician or family medicine doctor, once again following in his older brother's footsteps.

"Luis is in med school at Carolina now. To see my brother do so well inspires me," he said. "It feels like my calling as of now, but if I change my mind, I'll have my public health degree."

In the summer of 2022, Acosta participated in the Carolina Covenant Career Accelerator Program, which funded his research efforts with UNC Hospitals' emergency medicine department. While working with emergency medicine researchers, Acosta investigated ways to improve psychiatric patient transport and EMS responses to pediatric calls. Acosta's experience this summer strengthened his desire to work in the medical field.

"The Career Accelerator Program affirmed that I really want to become a clinician," he said. "The way I was able to volunteer at events and network with those already in the field helped me realize that this is where I'm meant to be." ■

A Carolina to Hollywood *Dream*

DECARLOS HICKSON '20

"I have this dream. I have these goals. How could I make my dream of becoming an animator a reality?"

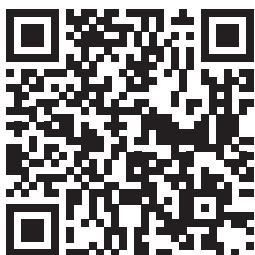
While attending Durham Technical Community College, and with the support of the Carolina Student Transfer Excellence Program (C-STEP), DeCarlos Hickson matriculated to UNC-Chapel Hill as a Carolina Covenant Scholar. While at Carolina, he found a network of supporters to fuel his passion for illustration and animation.

Most recently, Hickson accepted a position to serve on the Carolina Covenant Alumni Advisory Board (AAB). Associate Director of the Carolina Covenant and Alumni Engagement Ann Trollinger reflects on this new addition to the board.

"We are so proud to have DeCarlos giving back by serving on the Carolina Covenant Alumni Advisory Board and as an Alumni Advocate. With a successful career in animation for children's programming, he inspires students in our Career Accelerator Program to pursue their dreams in creative industries. We look forward to his advice on the AAB this year as we activate our growing alumni professional network for Covenant Scholars."

— Ann Trollinger

Associate Director of the Carolina Covenant
and Alumni Engagement



Watch this inspiring Carolina Story to see how DeCarlos Hickson went from working the night shift as a security guard to a career in animation at a global entertainment company in Los Angeles.




Carolina Covenant
BY THE NUMBERS



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




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



MORE THAN 70%
of Carolina Covenant alumni
have gone on to **ENROLL IN GRADUATE SCHOOL**

Stepping Ahead
WHITNEY NOBLE '23

Whitney Noble '23 has felt a calling to help people through the field of health care since her grandfather was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in 2004.

“I was always helping the nurses at UNC REX Hospital with my grandfather’s care,” Noble recalled. “Even though I was just a little kid, the nurses allowed me to help, which really inspired my interest in the field.”

After graduating from John T. Hoggard High School in Wilmington, North Carolina, Noble entered the medical workforce through an externship at Miller-Motte College, where she completed her associate’s degree in medical assistance and applied science. She worked as a medical assistant for a local neurosurgeon before changing paths and taking on a similar role at a mental health outpatient facility. She loved both jobs, but Noble knew she needed more.

“I became comfortable in my roles and wasn’t challenged enough,” Noble shared. “Nobody wanted me to leave, but I had to if I was going to advance my career. I decided to go back to school for nursing.”

While pursuing an associate’s degree in nursing from Wilmington’s Cape Fear Community College, Noble was drawn to the Carolina Student Transfer Excellence Program (C-STEP), a pathway for talented low-and moderate-income high school and community college students to transfer to Carolina.

“I had no idea what C-STEP was at first, but the more I learned about the program, the more I realized it fit my situation perfectly,” said Noble. “I decided to apply and see where it took me.”

After Noble was admitted to Carolina through C-STEP, she found out that she qualified for the Carolina Covenant. Growing up in a single-parent household — her father passed away when she was young — Noble never imagined she’d be able to attend any university, much less Carolina.

“If you would have told me a few years ago that I would be at Carolina, I would have told you ‘No way.’ It was too far-fetched to even think about,” Noble said. “I could have looked into student loans, but I didn’t want to have that debt over my head for the rest of my life. It would have just added more stress to what I was already dealing with, and I probably wouldn’t have pursued it. Words can’t describe how grateful I am for the Carolina Covenant.” ▶▶



As a first-generation college student who didn't know anyone else on campus, Noble was nervous, at first, but quickly acclimated to the larger college environment and was eager to embrace her new surroundings. During her first semester in fall 2020, she took a full course load of 16 hours while living on campus as the community governor for Carmichael Residence Hall and working long hours as a nursing assistant at UNC Hospitals in the midst of the pandemic.

She also volunteered with the Orange County Health Department, administering nasal swabs for COVID-19 tests, and joined the Carolina Cancer Association, an undergraduate student organization focused on cancer research and awareness.

After completing classes in human development and family studies, she applied and was accepted to the UNC School of Nursing.

Throughout every experience at Carolina, Noble said she continuously feels grateful for the support she receives from C-STEP, Carolina Covenant, her co-workers, and the UNC Residence Housing Association, where she is a residence hall adviser at Ram Village this year.

"If it were not for C-STEP and the Carolina Covenant, I would not be the person I am today," she said. "Both programs alleviated my financial stress and provided a wonderful community with the strong support of others to encourage me along the way."

Noble has started nursing school this fall and has truly come "full circle" in her medical experience, as she undertakes her first clinical rotation at WakeMed hospital — the same hospital where she was born 25 years ago. While she doesn't exactly know what the future holds, Noble is excited to see where her education and career will take her.

"I've been fortunate to have so much experience in so many different areas, but now I don't know what I want to be when I grow up!" Noble said, with a laugh. "My hope is to be an encouragement to others, to show that you can do anything you set your mind to, and that you can be supported by other great individuals to help lift you up to be the amazing person you are. Thank you for letting me do what I love while trying to better our community!" ■

Focused on *Career Development*

THE MARGERISONS

More than 50 years after receiving his scholarship to Carolina, Rick Margerison '70, along with his wife Leah, is still finding new ways to pay it forward to support rising generations of UNC-Chapel Hill students.

As a first-generation college student and scholarship recipient, Margerison has a deep appreciation for Carolina scholarships. Margerison and his brother, Kenneth Margerison '67, both earned scholarships that covered significant portions of their college expenses. With seasonal work and campus jobs, Rick Margerison was able to graduate from Carolina with minimal debt.

"Our family didn't have any money really, and we both went to Carolina on Whitaker scholarships. They were need-based and grade-based — you had to keep a dean's list average and your family had to need the money. I don't know how much debt I would have had or how long it would have taken me to get through without the scholarship. And so, when my wife and I got to the place when we could make some significant contributions, supporting scholarship students seemed like the first place to go."

Giving to Carolina is a family affair for the Margerisons. A successful career in the energy services industry gave Rick and Leah Margerison the means to help students graduate with little or no debt. Together with his brother, a college professor, and his brother's wife, Patty '67, the family has created three scholarship funds that support a total of 18 Carolina students each year.

Margerison considers himself fortunate to have had opportunities to interact with scholarship students over meals and events over the years. After talking with Carolina Covenant Scholars one night over dinner, he realized that for these students, "There is a lot more to [college] than just getting a degree."

"We are unbelievably proud of how Carolina handles the Covenant. It's the only school that does it. Getting those Covenant Scholars through with no debt is pretty amazing. There's just a lot more that those students need than the Covenant gives them."



Margerison remarked on one common thread in his conversations with students — despite academic success, many are unaware of what steps to take to prepare themselves to find employment after graduation.

This observation led to his support of the Connecting Carolina's Covenant Scholars initiative that aims to equip Carolina Covenant Scholars with the relationships, experiences and skills to compete and thrive beyond degree completion.

The Margerisons' gift supports a full-time permanent position focused on career development for Carolina Covenant Scholars. "It's a big need," said Margerison. "The gift will fund a coordinator to help students find the resources they need across the University and help them understand that they need to pay attention to preparing for their careers, in addition to their courses."

Rick Margerison's ambitions don't end there. He hopes that creating this position will be the start of something much bigger. "We hope this will be a big success. But we realize there are over 2,400 Covenant Scholars, and one coordinator is not going to be nearly enough. We hope if the program can show success with this coordinator, funding for more coordinators can be found in the future." ■

