“The Davis UWC Scholars Program provided an opportunity for me to fully explore my potential.”

-Fiorella Zarza, Pearson College UWC, University of Florida, 2023

“Nothing that I am doing today would have been possible for me if not for this amazing opportunity and I would love for this opportunity to remain available for future generations of international students coming to UF!”

-Nikola Kenjic, UWC Red Cross Nordic, University of Florida 2017

“Learn, Earn, Return”

-Shelby Davis
Davis United World College Scholars
Annual Report

Program Impact on Campus:

The Davis United World College Scholars program represents the value of diversity at the University of Florida. Students in the Davis UWC Scholars program come to UF from all over the globe and generously share the richness of their cultures and experiences with UF students. Their excellence greatly contributes to UF’s achievement as a top-five public university, and positively impacts its standing as a global leader.

Davis UWC Scholars arriving to the University of Florida for the 2022-23 academic year were introduced to the new Dean of the UF International Center, Dr. Marta Wayne.

“As your new dean, I am committed to increasing our international engagement, to keeping the UF community looking, learning, and researching beyond our borders. It’s what we owe our students and the people of the state of Florida—and the world.”

-Dr. Marta Wayne

Dr. Wayne is a professor of biology, specializing in the evolution & ecology of infectious disease and evolutionary genetics. Dr. Wayne’s international engagement began as a postdoc, when she participated in a trinational young investigators’ workshop (Germany, Japan, and the US) sponsored by the international scientific organization, Society for Molecular Biology & Evolution (SMBE).

Later, as president of SMBE, Dr. Wayne worked to broaden geographic representation within the society, including helping to schedule SMBE’s first annual conference in Latin America. At UF, she co-developed a new study abroad program, UF in Cusco (https://spanishandportuguese.ufl.edu/uf-in-peru/). She has mentored UF undergraduates, graduate students, and postdoctoral fellows from around the world and has received awards for teaching and mentoring.
Dr. Wayne provides leadership in the operation of the International Center and encourages international engagement in scholarship, research, and teaching. She supports the recruitment and success of international students, both undergraduate and graduate. She also promotes UF international alliances and seeks to increase international interaction for all members of the UF community.

**Progress Report:**

For the second consecutive year, UF has been named one of the top five best public universities in the 2023 U.S. News & World Report Best Colleges rankings. Our Davis UWC Scholars play an invaluable role in the realization of this accomplishment.

Housed within the Honors Program, Davis UWC Scholars engage in the highest-level academic offerings for undergraduates and uphold the program’s three pillars: Opportunity, Community, and Challenge.

- **Opportunity**
  
  In opportunity lies access, possibility and achievement. The future is molded by it; Honors students are driven by it. Opportunity allows Gators to discover and follow their paths and, through the UF Honors Program, affords deeper connections and personalized tracks to success.

- **Community**

  In a university of tens of thousands, the UF Honors Program provides a smaller, supportive community of high-achieving students, helpful advisors and top-notch faculty. This close network of creative scholars with diverse interests forms valuable, lifelong friendships and professional connections.

- **Challenge**

  Through challenge comes evolution. Whether by academic rigor, leadership, navigating personal growth or in a foreign country, the UF Honors Program is a challenge—not a reward—for students who thrive on overcoming obstacles and constantly redefining success.
In addition to delivering highly engaging academic opportunities, the Honors program provides various opportunities for Davis Scholars to acculturate into the Honors community and the University of Florida as a whole. There are a wide range of activities, events, and student organizations available for Davis Scholars to join, meet new friends and begin to build their own community.

To expand on the many offerings to our Honors program students, UF has broken ground on the highly anticipated Honors Residential College, known as “Honors Village.” The new complex will more than double the Honors Program housing capacity with 1,400 living spaces and will provide greater access to resources for students in the Honors Program. All first-year Davis students will be located there.

Plans for Honors Village boast a fully integrated residential, academic, and recreational complex. Honors Staff offices will be located on-site in the community’s central building. Davis UWC Scholars along with the greater UF Honors community will have the opportunity to connect with Honors staff seamlessly, facilitating a more robust academic experience.

Model Image of Honors Village
Rewards and Recognition:

UF’s Davis UWC Scholars excel academically and are often recognized with awards, commendations and scholarships because of their contributions to the university community. Their exemplary performance attests to why UF faculty advocate for greater enrollment of Davis Scholars. One faculty member, Professor Jason Alread, praised Davis UWC Scholars’ exceptional work ethic and leadership skills during a recent luncheon with the Davis UWC Scholars program’s Director of Partnership and Innovation, Jacob “Jake” Mnookin.

Professor Alread noted that many of the Davis UWC Scholars he has worked with matriculate at UF with leadership skills gained from their UWC high schools. Over the past year, several Davis UWC Scholars were recognized for academic excellence and exceptional leadership skills at UF.

Outstanding Undergraduate International Student Award Winners

Five of UF’s Davis UWC Scholars received the International Student award in Fall 2021. Students were awarded a $1,000 prize to support their education.

Award Winners from left to right:

Uchechukwu Ilodebe: from Nigeria, UWC Costa Rica; Xuchen Liu: from China, UWC Changshu China; Juliana Mishur: from Belarus, UWC Maastricht; Vicky Apostolou: from Greece, UWC Red Cross Nordic; Faisal Herzallah: from Jordan, UWC Red Cross Nordic
“This award recognizes undergraduate international students who have distinguished themselves by excelling in their studies while advancing a global citizenship mindset and contributing to the international profile of the UF community.”
- UF International Center Dean Leonardo Villalon

**Outstanding UF Summer Undergraduate International Research Program**

We were also excited to see two of our Davis UWC Scholars receive the 2022 Summer Undergraduate International Research Program award. These awards provide students the opportunity to spend up to 10 weeks studying abroad while participating in research with a host mentor.

- Jovana Grdinić, Architecture, College of Design, Construction and Planning, Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands.
- Melos Shtaloja, Architecture, College of Design, Construction and Planning, UNAM (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México).

**HONORING RETIRING DIRECTOR, DEBRA ANDERSON**

As we celebrate the graduation class of 2022 and welcome new Davis Scholars to campus, we pause to honor and thank someone who was at the helm of the UF International Student Support Services Center and worked with Davis UWC Scholars from the onset of the UF program. Debra Anderson retired this summer after 22 years of working as the Director for the UF International Student Support Services. Anderson made it her personal mission to ensure that international students were welcomed, well-acclimated and provided with the right resources to succeed while at UF.
Debra viewed the students she worked with as family. She recalls housing several of the UWC Scholars for the summer months while the campus dorms were closed, and also hosting sixty of the students at her home for a potluck dinner. When asked what stands out about Davis UWC Scholars, Debra stated that they highly value inclusion and integration. She went on to say that “the number one key element that I see is that the (Davis) UWC Students have already had this integration experience and therefore know the value……..when they come here they’ve had that international exposure to other countries.” She went on to speak about the students’ initiative to give back to other international students by founding the International Mentorship Association, started on campus last fall by Davis Scholar Alejandro Ortiz Lopez (UWC USA, 2024).

Debra Anderson’s tenure at the International Center immeasurably enriched the Davis United World College Scholars program and she will be greatly missed by students, faculty and staff.

*Debra Anderson meeting with international students*
Vicky has always wanted to explore the manifestations of human disease and be part of an inspiring hub of scientists. As a member of the UF community, she has had the opportunity to engage in groundbreaking biomedical research while reflecting on her identity and place in the academic setting. Being a Davis United World College Scholar, the values of inclusion and diversity have been central to her education, and she regards them as integral to her academic and professional growth at UF. She will continue to embrace those values while she pursues her graduate studies, no matter where that is.

Her urge to get familiar with the local surroundings and explore the intersection of service and research was fulfilled by the Active Learning Program, a College of Liberal Arts and Sciences 3-credit course that focuses on community-based projects. Throughout her freshman spring semester, she volunteered at HealthStreet, where the focus is understanding the social determinants of health in medical settings and employing evidence-based, community outreach practices to reduce disparities in healthcare and research. Of that experience, she recalls, "I got the chance to witness some of the nuances of the local community and learned to appreciate the great responsibility that comes with the abundance of resources and research funds that UF enjoys. Utilizing my lens as an international student, I viewed the issues addressed through a constructively comparative perspective, which expanded the scale of analysis beyond a US-centric one, which was often thought-provoking for my Floridian teammates."

Carrying the knowledge and skill sets she gained from HealthStreet into the beginning of her sophomore year, she started working in the Tibbetts lab in the Department of Microbiology and Molecular Genetics. “With lab members from Puerto Rico, China, Turkey and Canada, I
bizarrely felt at home as I was just getting started on the maze-like world of immunology and virology. While we all delved into the never-ending questions about the mechanisms by which herpesviruses infect and cause cancer, our separate global experiences encouraged us to communicate purposefully and create a more personal and involved research setting.”

Vicky’s research project on defining the specific virus and cellular markers that are expressed in tumors that arise in virus-infected mice was sponsored by the University Scholars Program, a competitive program that supports undergraduate students working one-on-one with a faculty member. “Ultimately, interacting with researchers from all around the world who are at UF in order to challenge their intellectual ‘limits’ and produce knowledge that is relevant to numerous parts of the globe, as it pertains to human disease, is the very reason I see myself in academia as I develop professionally. None of my future aspirations would be possible without the Davis UWC Program.”
Graduate’s Story: Nurul Azma Ahmad Tarmizi, UWC Red Cross Nordic, University of Florida 2017

Nurul graduated in December 2017 after studying for four-and-a-half years in the University of Florida’s Food Science and Human Nutrition Department. She was an Honors student who participated in community service while studying dietetics. Though classes were her top priority, “UWC values are embedded in her heart,” so she made time to volunteer in Gainesville because she understands the importance of contributing to her community wherever she resides.

Nurul is always compassionate. She believes in kindness and generosity. She chose to study nutrition because she wants to help people around her who suffer from non-communicable diseases. She believes that these diseases can be prevented through better diet. For her, it is personal. Her family has a history of cancer and type 2 diabetes.

UF provided her with endless options, and she used them to her advantage. She sought out experiences at a research lab, UF Health hospital, Malcolm Randall VA Hospital, food gardens, sustainable farms, and joined the Semester at Sea program. She participated in hands-on opportunities to apply the knowledge she learned in class. She sought to enrich her classrooms with her global perspective. And now, what began as a personal interest may grow into a lifelong career.

“At UWC, I would strike up a conversation with a Chinese friend talking about the impact of their one-child policy or with a Norwegian discussing their North Sea oil and gas policy financing the welfare state.”

Meanwhile, “At UF, I wrote a position paper to advise the City of Gainesville to pass the ordinance and implement the Mobile Fresh
Produce program because I was concerned about the food consumption of low-income families.”

Nurul was not ready to return home when she did. She recalled, “I came unprepared. The major nutrition problems here were foreign to me.” Indonesia suffers from a triple burden of malnutrition, i.e. undernutrition, overnutrition, and hidden hunger (micronutrient deficiencies). Her knowledge was limited to the common diseases in the United States. She had to start over.

Two years have passed since Nurul first came to work at the Ministry of National Development Planning, assisting the Deputy Minister for Human Development, Society and Cultural Affairs at the Scaling Up Nutrition Focal Point in Indonesia.

Her role is pivotal to optimizing the public private partnership in an effort to reduce malnutrition in the country.

“A few years later, I am talking to policy makers, development partners, and other non-government stakeholders concerning nutrition that will impact more than a quarter billion people.”

The Davis UWC community at UF made sure Nurul felt loved and supported even though she was almost ten thousand miles away from her family. She was able to focus on studying,
learning from the best teachers, and expanding her comfort zone. “I was able to explore many things as a Davis UWC Scholar. Now, I will continue building my career in nutrition policy and enjoy the beauty of my home country.”

**Campus Events:**

Campus life here at the University of Florida can be exhilarating. From Gator Sports to Greek Life, there are numerous activities for students to explore. Our international student population is encouraged to participate in campus events and can pick from a range of activities specifically geared towards cultivating their experience as students studying away from their home countries.

To start the 2021-22 academic year, Davis UWC Scholars and students from our other Honors Programs, the Lombardi and Stamps Scholars, joined together for a sunshine-filled day at UF’s Lake Wauburg for fun and team building. Students had an opportunity to socialize with their peers, mingle and meet new friends, and become acquainted with their Honors Program community. Students also had the opportunity to take in some of the area’s beautiful scenery and warm weather.
Community Building at Lake Wauburg, October 2021

Our Davis UWC Scholars ended the 2021-22 school year celebrating the graduating class of 2022, who will be remembered for their resilience, courage, and strength as they endured the
adversity of a global pandemic. This group of students experienced a unique set of challenges during their time at UF, yet they stayed the course and can be proud of their tenacity. With hard work and dedication, these students saw it through to the finish line and joined the prestigious group of UF Davis UWC Scholar graduates.

Davis UWC Scholars Program Class of 2022

Our annual UF Davis UWC Scholars Welcome Reception was held September 6 to kick off the 2022-23 school year. The event brings together new and existing Davis Scholars to introduce the new cohort and present them with their Letter and Globe from Shelby Davis and Phil Geier. We welcomed Jake Mnookin, new Director of Partnership and Innovation for the Davis UWC Scholars Program, who spoke to the assembled group.

During his visit, we arranged a luncheon for Jake to meet with several of our Davis Scholars and faculty who spoke about the vital impact of the program on our campus. Jake also had an opportunity to tour the construction site of Honors Village and joined us at the Welcome Reception to speak to UF’s new
cohort of UWC Scholars. Later that evening he attended dinner with some of our senior UWC Scholars and program liaison Regan Garner to discuss the success of the program. All agreed that it was a pleasure and an honor to host Jake at the University of Florida and we hope to see him again soon.

Jake presenting UF Davis UWC Scholars with Welcome Letter and Globe

Group photo of Davis UWC Scholars at 2022-23 Welcome Reception.
In an article from the Independent Florida Alligator, UF’s campus newspaper, UWC graduates were featured for their celebration of United World College Day. Davis Scholars tabled outside of the student union to share information about the program with students throughout the campus. The theme for this year’s celebrations was “Peace Begins with Us.” Scholars had the opportunity to share their experiences while at United World Colleges and inform others about the program. Jose Cabrera Benavides shared, “there I opened my eyes and my mind to a global scope and started thinking more about what’s happening in the world” (UWC Red Cross Nordic).

You can read the entire article at: Education without borders: UF international students celebrate United World College Day - The Independent Florida Alligator.

Davis UWC Scholars tabling at UF Reitz Union in celebration of United World College Day.
President’s Statement:

“I am encouraged by the strength and tenacity of our international students who come to the University of Florida from all over the globe to reach and achieve their academic goals. Our Davis UWC Scholars add immense value to our student population and bring the richness of diversity and their individual cultures. The strides our scholars have made has helped to propel the mission of excellence in education and research here at the University of Florida. I am confident that the determination and courage of our Davis UWC Scholars will lead them into successful careers as the next leaders and global change makers.”

-UF President Kent Fuchs

UWC Campuses Visited:

The following Davis UWC campuses were visited this past year:

- Atlantic
- Armond Hammer USA
- Changshu
- Costa Rica
- Dilijan
- East Africa
- ISAK
- Maastricht
- Mahindra
- Mostar
- Robert Bosch College
- Southeast Asia Dover campus
- Waterford