The Excellence Pipeline

In 2015, USC Academic Honors and Fellowships (AHF) launched as an umbrella unit within the Office of Undergraduate Programs to serve undergraduate merit scholars, academic honor awardees, and nationally competitive fellowship applicants. In so doing, a pipeline for USC’s most high-achieving undergraduate students was built. Five years later, USC AHF presents this first annual report in celebration of this year’s honorees, our dedicated faculty partners, and the enriching academic journey traveled together along this pipeline.

The students featured in this report are intelligent and talented in their own right. They are eager, seek out unique opportunities to expand their educational experience, and make the most of their undergraduate years. The role of the AHF staff is to engage students early and often and support them in:

- clarifying their ambition through engagement in high-impact practices,
- developing skills in critical thinking and reflection, and
- building meaningful relationships with faculty, staff, and their peers.

Many of our students matriculate at USC as merit scholars with demonstrated intellectual and leadership acumen. Throughout their college experience, they study across academic disciplines and share achievements in the arts, writing, and research at Undergraduate Programs’ Signature Academic Events, including the Undergraduate Writers’ Conference or Undergraduate Symposium for Scholarly & Creative Work. They participate in unique USC programs for exceptional students, like the Schaeffer Fellows in Government Service program. As they continue at USC, our students study abroad and lead research projects, producing work that is recognized with academic honors upon graduation. Finally, as they graduate, our students pursue post-graduate fellowships across the globe to apply their academic learning on an international level.

2019-2020 has been a very successful year for our talented Trojans. This document recognizes our awardees, the faculty who partnered with us in mentoring them, and the valuable advising pipeline USC AHF has established. Fight on!

Erica Lovano McCann, Ed.D
Assistant Vice Provost, Undergraduate Programs

Our Mission

USC Academic Honors and Fellowships educates the USC community about university awards and external fellowships, and mentors motivated students and recent alumni in their pursuit of these opportunities. We support Trustee, Presidential, Mork Family, and Stamps Scholars in the promotion of a vibrant Scholar community.

Looking back on my college experience, some of my proudest moments were during these application processes and the interactions I had with the AHF office. I can’t say enough how much I have appreciated their guidance.

Abigail Jackson '20
Rhodes candidate, Renaissance Prize Winner
Fulbright Research Recipient to Germany

By the Numbers

- 76 academic honors and fellowship recipients in 2020
- 26 academic honors and fellowships in the AHF advising portfolio
- 441 USC Scholar Distinction recipients in 2020
- 1000+ student advising sessions

Meet Our Staff

Katie Capra
Manager

Andy Jones-Liang
Senior Program Specialist

Willa Erickson
Fellowships Advisor & Schaeffer Fellows Coordinator
Administered through USC Undergraduate Admission, USC Merit Scholarships are awarded to incoming first-year students based on academic excellence, leadership, service and talent. Academic Honors and Fellowships provides general advising and programmatic support for nearly 2000 students who are the recipients of Presidential, Trustee, Mork, and Stamps Scholarships.

AHF coordinates Exceptional Funding for merit scholars to take additional academic courses beyond what is covered by flat-rate tuition. In the 2019-2020 academic year, around 360 merit scholars utilized Exceptional Funding.

AHF also advises the Trojan Scholars Society (TSS), the student association that brings together merit scholars for academic, social, and cultural events throughout the academic year.

A Community of Scholars

Event Highlight
DEANS AND FACULTY TEA

The Trojan Scholars Society hosted the 2nd Annual Deans & Faculty Tea on November 4, 2019. During an afternoon of refreshments and conversation with esteemed USC deans and faculty, students were able to expand their academic networks and identify potential new mentors and research opportunities. Over 60 students and 18 faculty were in attendance, represented across nearly all USC schools.

The event also included a keynote speech from Dr. Andrea Hodge, Vice Provost of Undergraduate Programs, who emphasized the importance of seeking mentorship as part of one’s academic journey.

Funding Opportunities

USC recognizes the outstanding abilities of its undergraduate students and has created various opportunities to financially support students in their pursuit of interdisciplinary study, global exchange, and civic engagement. Here are a few of the unique opportunities facilitated by Academic Honors and Fellowships that are only available to USC undergraduate students.

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

The Academic Achievement Award (AAA) provides a tuition benefit to students who are pursuing multiple undergraduate degree objectives, have at least sophomore standing, and have earned a cumulative USC GPA of at least 3.75. AAA allows Fall or Spring registration of up to 21 units at the standard full-time tuition rate.

The purpose of the award is to allow highly motivated students with excellent academic records to complete multiple undergraduate degree objectives without adding to their time-to-degree.

In 2019-2020, 614 undergraduates across a diversity of disciplines were awarded more than $2 million dollars through the Academic Achievement Award.

AFRICA STUDENT FUND

The USC Africa Student Fund is a scholarship intended to support undergraduate student travel to African countries for study, research, service-based learning and internships.

In the 2019-2020 academic year, 7 students were selected for full or partial funding. While travel will be deferred due to COVID-19, the recipients look forward to utilizing their award in 2021 to visit countries such as South Africa, Uganda, Senegal, and Tanzania.

SCHAEFFER FELLOWS IN GOVERNMENT SERVICE

The Leonard D. Schaeffer Fellows in Government Service program exposes talented undergraduates to government work and its impact through 10-week, full-time, high level internships at the local, state, and federal levels.

In 2019, ten USC students joined a national cohort of 45 Fellows. Program benefits include:

• Assistance identifying internship opportunities
• An alumni mentor
• A fully funded trip to the national Schaeffer Fellows Summit in Washington, D.C.
• A $5,000 stipend and professional accessories
• A fall recognition event with Leonard Schaeffer, USC Trustee and program founder

Alumni of the 2019 USC cohort have earned competitive fellowships, entered active military duty, and started positions in public service.
Signature Academic Events

Undergraduate Programs Signature Academic Events invite undergraduate students to explore diverse academic disciplines, showcase scholarly and creative endeavors with the university community, and foster academic and professional growth. The series of events includes:

**WELCOME WEEK MICRO-SEMINARS**
Small group sessions for incoming first-year students to immerse in a college-level, discussion-based workshop on a specialized topic. Seminars are designed to introduce students to USC professors and familiarize them with the academic environment before classes begin.

**RESEARCH AND FELLOWSHIPS WEEK**
Open to students of all academic levels, Research and Fellowships Week offers interactive sessions and panels highlighting opportunities for research, graduate study, language learning, teaching and internships within the U.S. and abroad.

**UNDERGRADUATE WRITERS’ CONFERENCE**
The Undergraduate Writers’ Conference provides students with a forum to share and discuss their writing with peers. Students submit original work, engage in small group discussions, and enjoy an awards ceremony banquet.

**UNDERGRADUATE SYMPOSIUM FOR SCHOLARLY & CREATIVE WORK**
The Undergraduate Symposium provides students with the unique opportunity to exhibit and share examples of their significant research and creative work with the university community.

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**2019 - 2020 Event Highlights**

**MICRO-SEMINARS**
Last August, AHF hosted 65 Micro-Seminars featuring a diversity of topics and faculty from nearly all the USC Schools. More than 1200 incoming first-year students participated over two days during Welcome Week. Event evaluations confirmed the events success with nearly 96% of student attendees reporting satisfaction with their learning experience.

**RESEARCH & FELLOWSHIPS WEEK**

Research and Fellowships 101
90% of participants reported feeling “extremely satisfied” with AHF’s opening session. They “strongly agreed” that they are more likely to follow up with AHF about opportunities after attending this session.

Summer Opportunities Fair
More than double its size from the previous year, 25 campus partners across UPC and HSC highlighted their summer experiential learning and research opportunities. Current students represented the external NSF Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) program, while faculty recruited undergraduate research assistants for special projects.

Fulbright U.S. Student Program Panel
Always a highlight of the week, the Fulbright session featured two USC Fulbright alumnae who shared their experiences from application to grant-end with audience members. Geetha Somayajula (pictured bottom left) is a 2020 Fulbright Ambassador and will serve as an ongoing resource for the next cohort of Fulbright applicants.

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Survey response from Micro-Seminar attendee, “Generating Solutions for a Sustainable World”:

“It was smart to get back in the classroom before school starts! This micro-seminar was very interesting and enjoyable. I learned how to get involved on making a change in the sustainability of our campus.”

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In Spring 2020, we received more than 450 submissions from 338 individual students, representing over 100 majors at USC. Their diversity of interests produced a broad array of paper topics across writing genres. A dedicated group of Writing Program faculty reviewed thousands of pages and identified winners in four categories. This year’s fifteen winners were announced online on April 1.

**UNDERGRADUATE SYMPOSIUM FOR SCHOLARLY & CREATIVE WORK**
Due to COVID-19, preparations are underway to ensure the event can occur in Spring 2021.
Commencement Honors

VALEDICTORIAN & SALUTATORIANS

The USC selection process for Valedictorian and Salutatorians recognizes students who have attained the highest levels of academic achievement. It is also holistic and takes into consideration other components such as service and leadership.

This year 61 graduating students who had earned a cumulative USC grade point average (GPA) of 3.980 or higher were invited to apply. The 2020 USC Valedictorian and Salutatorians are:

- Isabella Hauptman
  Cognitive Science (B.S.); Public Health minor
- Thomas Jae Hyun Kim
  International Relations, Environmental Studies minor
- Gavin Kress
  Biomedical Engineering (B.S.); Physics minor

UNIVERSITY TRUSTEES AWARD is granted to graduating senior men who have attained the highest scholarship average of all undergraduate transfer students at the University. The recipients have attained a perfect 4.0 grade point average.

- Nihar Agrawal
  Computer Science (B.S.)
- Needlesh Bagrodia
  Biomedical Engineering (B.S.)
- Rae Lan
  Neuroscience (B.S.); Biotechnology minor
- Michael James Wong
  Health and Human Sciences; Professional Science minor
- Jingyun Yang
  Computer Science (B.S.)

USC PROVOST AWARD is granted to graduating senior women who have attained the highest scholarship average of all undergraduate transfer students at the University. The recipients have attained a perfect 4.0 grade point average.

- Annelisse Cuellar-Montes
  Human Biology (B.S.)
- Honor Hayball
  Public Policy
- Mami Horikawa
  Chemistry (Research) (B.S.)
- Arias Mangararan
  Psychology
- Danielle Morales
  Public Policy (B.S.); Social Entrepreneurship minor
- Zhonghao Shi
  Computer Science (B.S.)
- Adrien Verus
  Narrative Studies; German and Jewish Studies minor
- Elizabeth Winnicki
  Human Biology (B.S.)

USC SCHOLAR DISTINCTIONS

Renaissance Scholars, Discovery Scholars, and Global Scholars are academic honors that recognize graduating seniors. Scholars receive a medallion for graduation, have their distinction noted on their transcript, and can apply for consideration for the Prize Competition. Each year, ten students from each of the three distinctions are selected for a $10,000 prize towards graduate study.

STEVEN AND KATHRYN SAMPLE RENAISSANCE SCHOLARS recognizes undergraduate students who have excelled in their studies while completing a major and a minor (or two majors) in widely separated fields of study. For the 2019-2020 cycle, USC recognized 280 Renaissance Scholars, and 11 have been selected as prize recipients.

- Jeffrey Cho, Linguistics: Education and Society minor
- Alexandra Famiglietti, Global Health (B.S.), History
- Megan Goodman, Neuroscience; Theatre, Cinematic Arts, and Health Care Studies minors
- Abigail Jackson, Computational Neuroscience (B.S.), Philosophy
- Kanak Kapur, English (Creative Writing); International Relations minor
- Sina Karachian, Computer Science (B.S.), Composition (B.M.); Classical Perspectives minor
- Katherine Knox, Engineering (Environmental Engineering) (B.S.); International Relations minor
- Micah Light, Anthropology, Art
- Emily Liu, English, Political Economy. Applied Comp Security and Env. Studies minors
- Ryan Moreno, Computer Science (B.S.); English minor
- Katarzyna Pilch, Cognitive Science (B.S.); Two-Dimensional Studies minor

GLOBAL SCHOLARS recognizes students who have excelled in their studies both at home and abroad. Students must spend at least 10 weeks abroad and complete a capstone project related to their international experiences. For the 2019-2020 cycle, USC recognized 51 Global Scholars, and 10 have been selected as prize recipients.

- Sofia Bosch, Journalism; Communication Policy & Law and International Relations minors
- Virginia Bullington, Narrative Studies; International Relations minor
- Lisa de Ræufs, International Relations, Economics; French minor
- Brooke Helstrom, Environmental Studies, Philosophy, Politics & Law
- Rae Lan, Neuroscience (B.S.); Biotechnology minor
- Aarooh Mahabirshwarkar, International Relations, Natural Science minor
- Ellen Murray, Theatre, Dance minor
- Domenica Ordonez, Architecture (B.Arch.); Communication Design minor
- Erin Pineda, International Relations, German minor
- Julia Thorner, Business Administration (B.S.)

DISCOVERY SCHOLARS recognizes students who have made a meaningful contribution to their field of study. Students must present original research or creative projects representing the culmination of their academic studies. For the 2019-2020 cycle, USC recognized 110 Discovery Scholars, and 10 have been selected as prize recipients.

- Rose Bueno, Cinema and Media Studies
- Nicole Buss, Real Estate Development (B.S.); Occupational Science minor
- Joelle Ferguson, Public Relations
- Nicholas Guardino, Biological Sciences (B.S.)
- Tasnya Jahangir, Psychology; Public Health and Spanish minors
- Shomik Jain, Applied and Computational Mathematics (B.S.); Computer Science minor
- Guadalupe Mota, History
- Mitiasoa Razafy, Global Health (B.S.)
- Pooja Singh, Pharmacology & Drug Dev. (B.S.); Business Finance and Natural Science minors
- Hannah Walker, Mechanical Engineering (B.S.)
Our Impact

The application processes for Mitchell and Fulbright were two of the most influential experiences of my college career, but it took me a few months to figure out why. The weeks after my rejections were tough. I doubted my abilities and questioned whether or not I would be able to succeed in future application pools. But as time passed... I found the things that made those application processes worth the time and effort. The AHF [staff] and review committees helped me learn more about who I was and who I wanted to be. You gave me the honest feedback I needed. You poked holes in my ideas, my goals, and my beliefs, testing me and prompting me to think more about the things I value. Those moments of self-discovery, I believe, are priceless.”

Jack Cagney ’20
Mitchell and Fulbright ETA candidate

Practical & Interpersonal Skill Development

- Time management
- Working with a mentor
- Developing a personal narrative
- Writing skills
- Understanding what matters to me and why

90% of Fulbright applicants who participated in the campus evaluation process reported improvement in:

Student Spotlight | Kayla Soren ’20

Kayla Soren graduated in May 2020 with majors in Environmental Studies and International Relations. Upon entering USC, Kayla was connected to AHF as a Mork Family Scholar. Kayla is the founder of the International Student Environmental Coalition (ISEC), an international network of 30 countries that provides resources and organizational power to help students anywhere in the world engage in the grassroots movement of climate justice.

Through advising and support from AHF, Kayla received both the Truman Scholarship and Udall Scholarship in 2019. As a recent alumna, Kayla will continue to work with AHF in pursuit of post-graduate fellowships in the United Kingdom. USC AHF is privileged to partner with many exceptional students, such as Kayla, throughout their undergraduate career. The opportunity to support students in applying for awards and fellowships that fit their academic ambitions and can expand their worldview is a prime example of the excellence pipeline.

Fellowship Fridays

Academic Honors and Fellowships offers drop-in advising on several Fridays during the fall and spring semesters. Students use this informal meeting time to ask general questions about awards and fellowships, campus application processes, USC Scholar Distinction projects, or to plan for the future.

Whether a student is new to our resources, or is a current applicant with questions about upcoming deadlines, all are encouraged to attend Fellowship Fridays to meet with our staff and look through our advising materials. USC students and alumni are able to access binders of successful essays from previous USC fellowship recipients.

Faculty Partnerships

Our office relies on strong relationships with faculty across disciplines. These expert mentors volunteer their time to serve on evaluation and selection committees that offer students individualized constructive feedback and mock interview experience. This report includes the complete list of faculty members who served on committees in the previous academic year.

Alumni Engagement

Alumni can access the resources our office provides up to three years after graduation from any USC program. For example, our recent Rhodes & Schwarzman Scholarship recipients have applied via the AHF post-graduate pipeline. Alumni also return to serve on campus review committees, provide feedback to future applicants, participate as featured speakers on informational panels, and allow us to archive their statements in our extensive library of winning applications essays.

Our Approach to Advising

AHF supports applicants with individual advising for select competitive national and international scholarships and fellowships. Outstanding undergraduate students, recent alumni, and graduate students may qualify for fellowships offering funding to pursue research, study, and internship in the U.S. and abroad.

AHF staff focus on providing a holistic, developmental advising experience for each student. We define success beyond the number of students selected for awards. Instead, we focus on creating an advising experience that engages students in critical reflection, aids them in clarifying their ambitions, and supports them in building meaningful academic relationships with faculty and their peers.

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Fellowship Highlights

FULBRIGHT U.S. STUDENT PROGRAM

Academic Honors and Fellowships has developed an extensive advising and evaluation process for USC applicants of the Fulbright U.S. Student Program. The grant provides one year of funding for recipients to study, conduct research or teach English in one of over 140 countries around the world.

Applicants who submitted through USC participated in the faculty panel campus evaluation process. Applicants also took advantage of USC Fulbright resources, such as the spring writing workshop series and summer individual advising sessions. This year, AHF supported 80 students who applied through USC for the Fulbright U.S. Student program. Of these applicants, 47 were selected as semi-finalists, and 23 were ultimately chosen as 2020-2021 grant recipients across 17 different countries.

Each year, The Chronicle of Higher Education highlights institutions with the most Fulbright recipients. USC has been ranked as a top producing institution of Fulbright U.S. students since 2012.

2020-2021 USC Fulbrighters Overview

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USC has been named a top producing institution of Fulbright U.S. Students for the 8th year in a row!

GOLDWATER SCHOLARSHIP

Barry Goldwater Scholarships are awarded to outstanding undergraduates who are studying mathematics, natural sciences or engineering and who intend to pursue a research career. The scholarship awards up to $7,500 for the remaining year(s) of study at USC.

This year, 4 undergraduates from the Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences have been awarded scholarships from the Barry Goldwater Scholarship and Excellence in Education Foundation. This is the highest number of Goldwater Scholarship recipients selected from USC in a single year. The students were chosen from a pool of more than 1,300 undergraduates nominated by 46 institutions in the United States. The recipients are (pictured from top to bottom):

- Aaron Ghrist
  Applied and Computational Mathematics, Chemistry (Chemical Nanoscience) (B.S.); Classical Perspectives minor
- Leena Mathur
  Computer Science (B.S.); Cognitive Science, Linguistics
- Stephen Quinton
  Chemical Engineering (B.S.); Applied and Computational Mathematics
- Emily Yang
  Quantitative Biology (B.S.); Sociology minor

SCHWARZMAN SCHOLARS

Designed to prepare young leaders to deepen understanding between China and the rest of the world, the Schwarzman Scholars program is the first scholarship created to respond to the geopolitical landscape of the 21st century. With the inaugural class enrolled in 2016, the program gives the world’s best and brightest students the opportunity to develop their leadership skills and professional networks through a fully-funded, one-year master’s degree at Tsinghua University in Beijing – one of China’s most prestigious universities.

This year, 3 USC Trojans were selected as Schwarzman Scholars - the highest number of scholars from the University in a single year. The trio is among 145 students and recent college graduates selected from more than 4,700 applicants and 41 countries. The three Scholars are (pictured from top to bottom):

- Christopher Carpenter ('16)
  Film & Television Production, Cognitive Science
- Songzhi (Richard) Huang ('20)
  Business Administration (World) (B.S.)
- Gabrielle Roberts ('19)
  Film & Television Production, Computer Science (B.S.)
The Faculty Perspective: “Students start the fellowship process with an idea, roughly developed, that builds on an influential academic experience. The mentoring process allows them to delve more deeply into their ultimate aspirations, connecting different parts of their proposals with many aspects of their past experiences. They hone this raw passion and burgeoning ideas to form a successful proposal. I love witnessing the spark when students realize the ways their projects bring different aspects of their education together and creates an imagined future that leads them towards their future careers.”

Nina Srinivasan Rathbun, Professor (Teaching) of International Relations