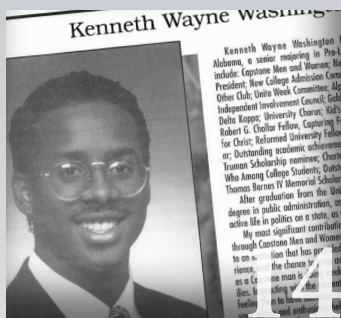


ANNUAL *Connections* 2020

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REALIZING THE DREAM	26



Cover details:
Blackburn Retrospective
Panel at Alabama Museum of
Natural History during 2019
Annual Symposium and 25th
Anniversary Celebration.



Division of
Student Life
Blackburn Institute

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students, Fellows and Advisory
Board members.

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"My vision is to develop a community of ethical leaders who collaboratively accomplish good and noble ends."

Dr. John L. Blackburn

Each fall at the dawn of a new academic year, Blackburn students, Fellows, and Advisory Board members make the pilgrimage to Tuscaloosa to attend Annual Symposium. This year will be different. While we won't occupy the same physical space due to the ongoing pandemic, we will gather together online to hear engaging speakers, share innovative ideas, and continue to collaborate for change.

A new year is an important time of reflection. Our community has had much to celebrate over the last twelve months. We've surpassed our fundraising goal for the Blackburn Legacy Endowment Campaign, ensuring we have the necessary resources to continue providing immersive learning experiences for our students and expand opportunities for our Fellows. Additionally, we've seen new students, returning students, and Fellows actively impacting local communities through the Daniel Community Scholars Program.

Over the summer we launched Blackburn Connect, an online networking platform that will provide members direct access to intergenerational collaboration and strengthen the bonds of our community for many years to come. This has become an extremely useful tool to build relationships among Blackburn students, Fellows, and Advisory Board members, particularly in a time of physical distancing. The success of our virtual Summer Networking Events and Community Conversations on Race and Justice has helped us connect those who cannot make it back to campus. We look forward to hosting additional online engagement opportunities.

As we look ahead, the staff has planned a hybrid student curriculum that will feature an increase in virtual events to complement socially distant and safe in-person experiential learning opportunities, where possible. At symposium we will explore the theme of "Leadership in Times of Crisis," with special attention given to both the response to the novel Coronavirus as well as the ongoing challenges of racial injustice. Now, perhaps more than ever, we need a diverse group of ethical change agents, who are willing to work for a better Alabama and a better nation.

I am pleased to share this publication featuring Blackburn students, Fellows, and Advisory Board members and their current work. My hope is that these narratives will inspire each of us to take action on our collective values and individual passions as we seek to answer Dr. Blackburn's abiding interrogative, "What have you done today?" Let us redeem the time and fulfill our calling to serve this present age.

Roll Tide!

JERRAN S. HILL



BLACKBURN SOCIETY MEMBERS

MR. BILL BAXLEY	DR. HARRY KNOPKE	MRS. HOLLY PIPER
MRS. GLORIA BLACKBURN	DR. F. DAVID MATHEWS	DR. MALCOLM PORTERA
DR. CHEREE CAUSEY	DR. E. GAYLON MCCOLLOUGH	MRS. JULIA SMEDS ROTH
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DR. SANDRAL HULLETT	MR. TOM PATTERSON	DR. LOUISE THIBODAUX
MRS. ANN JONES	MRS. BEVERLY PHIFER	MR. EDGAR WELDEN

* DECEASED

OVERARCHING VALUES

FACILITATING A DIVERSITY OF OPINION

by providing opportunities for students to experience all sides of issues impacting their communities as well as creating situations for open dialogue focused on fostering the resolution of issues rather than their mere identification.

BEING CALLED TO ACTION

by inspiring active citizenship as individuals and collectively by identifying and implementing strategic initiatives for the common good.

NETWORKING THROUGH THE GENERATIONS

by providing opportunities for students and Fellows to engage in dialogue and personal contact with Advisory Board members, faculty, community leaders, scholars, and political leaders.

INSTILLING A LIFETIME COMMITMENT

by providing a rich collegiate experience so that, upon graduation, Fellows are encouraged not only to continue to foster relationships with the Blackburn Institute and its members, but to also uphold the ideals of the Institute in their daily lives.

2020 ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS

NORM BALDWIN	BOOTS GALE	WARREN MATTHEWS	GINA RIGBY-HOUSE
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CHEREE CAUSEY	JENNIFER JENKINS	TAYLOR NICHOLS *	CHRISTIAN SMITH *
PRINCE CLEVELAND *	DOUG JONES	MARJORIE NIX	JOAN SMITH *
SUE BELL COBB	ALLI KOSZYK *	BILL O'CONNOR	LYNWOOD SMITH
JOHN COVINGTON	TERRY LAMAR	CAROL PATTERSON #	DONALD STEWART
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MILTON DAVIS	MATTHEW LEWIS *	ANDRES PEÑA *	LOU THIBODAUX
LEEANN DENHAM *	MARY LIEB *	HOLLY PIPER	ROBERT TURNER *
DAVID DONALDSON	PETER LOWE	CHUCK PRICE	JOSHUA WHITE *
BEN FOSTER *	MARK MARTIN *	PAT REYNOLDS *	TAMEKA WREN
	DAVID MATHEWS		JACKIE WUSKA

* FELLOW # TEMPORARY SABBATICAL

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AND OFFICERS

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Chairperson

ALEX SMITH
Vice Chairperson

ROBERT HARRIS, III *
Secretary

MARION MCINTOSH *
At Large Member

MIKE HOUSE
Immediate Past Chairperson

MELINDA KING
Student Life Designee

JERRAN HILL (EX OFFICIO)
Interim Director

OF 69 TOTAL
MEMBERS

23 ARE
FELLOWS

83%
OF ADVISORY
BOARD MEMBERS
ARE IN STATE.

Nominate a Board Member

Nominations for Advisory Board members are actively solicited from current and past board members, students, and Blackburn Fellows. Nominations are reviewed by the Leadership Development Committee and, after initial conversations, forwarded to the Advisory Board for a vote by the full board. The Advisory Board strives to be a diverse body, representative of the state of Alabama, that can ensure “the Blackburn Institute maintains sufficient civic, business, political, and financial resources to carry out the mission of the institute.”

blackburninstitute.sa.ua.edu/advisory-board/prospective-advisory-board-members/



STUDENT Spotlight

Arianna Kellum

Arianna Kellum is a junior from Westerville, Ohio pursuing a major in nursing and a minor in Spanish. As a member of UA's Honors College, Arianna participated in Honors Action: Health Action and volunteered for Impact America. During these experiences, she learned about the health disparities and other inequalities that occurred in the state, which inspired her to join the Blackburn Institute. Arianna participated in the Spanish for Healthcare course where she volunteered as an interpreter at the Maude Whatley Clinic and hopes to work in the neonatal or obstetrics field, providing infant or prenatal care to women in rural or lower SES communities. She is currently a cardiology technician at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio. Arianna is also an active member of the Black Faculty and Staff Association as a mentor through the Black Scholars program and enjoys spending time with her friends and family in addition to watching basketball, football, and soccer. Most importantly, Arianna gives back to her community whenever she can and is happy to call Alabama her home.

Life has a funny way of placing us in situations we never thought we'd be in, which could be either good or bad. However, in the end, we tend to learn something from either outcome. Prior to arriving in Alabama, I felt there was something at the Capstone in which I was supposed to be a part. I found myself trying to be the person I thought I should be, checking boxes off rather than searching for what fulfilled my soul.

At the right time, Blackburn came into my life and showed me a part of myself that I hadn't met yet. Participating in the new student retreat, I was surrounded by people from different walks of life, who held different passions and points of view, yet became united at that moment through the Institute. During our day to day routine, we may have seen each other around campus and held preconceived notions of who we were. However, by being a member of the Blackburn Institute, we began to see one another on a deeper level.

By sharing our stories and experiences, we were able to empathize with one another. For example, there were fellow classmates who I did not agree with politically. In the past, I engaged in heated discussions where I would fight to

be right, not to understand. As we see in today's national climate, it is difficult to get things done if we cannot find common ground. While I have the right to form opinions based on my experience, everyone else has the same right.

After my first year in the Institute, I was able to evolve, taking the time to understand what led students to their beliefs and respect why they formed their opinions. As I got to know my class, I became inspired by the stories I heard about who they were, where they came from, and how that molded their mission. My eyes opened to see a spectrum of stances, opinions, problems, and solutions I was unaware of until I was a part of Blackburn. An element of being a member of Blackburn is that we are constantly learning.

Having been elected student chairperson, my thought process continues to evolve, especially when it comes to being a leader. As chairperson, I dreamt of creating the best class yet, with deeper bonds and more challenging discussions. Then, life and COVID-19 crumpled up my ideal plan and threw it out of the window. When the pandemic arrived, I felt defeated. I didn't know how to keep students invested in the Institute while being miles away. I didn't

know where to go or what to do. I was struggling to cope with the changes in my life outside of Blackburn; I didn't feel like I could put on a strong face and offer solace in the face of uncertainty.

However, being a leader means persisting towards the destination, in spite of being thrown off course. A leader is able to adapt to the needs of the group to ensure progress toward the goal. A leader is also able to recognize when they need help. I knew that I needed to lean on my Blackburn family during these surreal times. From virtual socials to serious discussions, current and former student officers worked with the staff to provide ways for the Blackburn community to connect.

During times of social change, we need to realize we need one another's support in order to get through this

journey. The Blackburn Institute gives me hope — it's a place where different voices can not only come together to take action but to be heard. I hope students take the time to listen to one another. No matter what is going on in life, every person is fighting their own battles. The simple yet underutilized tool of listening can allow us to relate to someone who may seem completely different. Empathy can allow us to build connections in ways we wouldn't believe and from that, we can develop long lasting relationships with people who will respect and support us in times of need. For me, the most inspiring part of the Institute is the cultivation of diverse student leaders who are coming together for a common goal. While individually we are a formidable force, we are unstoppable as a community. 🌱



A collage of student portraits with the text "Blackburn Institute 2020 New Student Class" overlaid. A white silhouette of the state of Alabama is centered over the collage.

Blackburn Institute

2020 New Student Class

Nour Akl	Griffin Howard
Angela Barajas Salcido	Trinity Hunter
Johnny Baxley	Ebone Ivory
Mary Eliza Beaumont	Ariel Jones
Justin Brantum	Quin Kelly
Pike Briggs	Hannah King
Frances Buntain	Dalis Lampkins
Nate Burns	Vito Lombardi
Anna Cain	Roshan Malladi
Sav Campbell	Brandon Marsh
Nautica Davis	Perry Martin
Iyana Diaz	Garrett Mayo
Ibby Dickson	Price McGiffert
Brady Duke	Princess Moore
Patrick Dutton	Brekeese Pierce
Mariah Ellis	Alex Sandlin
Teairra Evans	Sarah Shield
Lindsay Fincher	Alli Swann
Kate Fountain	Sam Taylor
Aaron Frederick	JaiOnna Terry
Heather Gann	Darius Thomas
Preston Hall	Jana Venable
Philip Harden	Ellen Walton
Eric Harrison	Callen Woodard
Benjamin Honan	David Zell



PROGRAM Spotlight

Burt Jones Rural Community Experience

Samuel Reece is a senior from Montevallo, Alabama. He is majoring in political science and American studies and minoring in creative writing and social innovation and leadership. He is part of the University Fellows Experience and the Honors College, the Director of the NoteABLE music education and outreach program, and team leader of Vote Everywhere UA, a campus chapter of the Andrew Goodman Foundation. He is planning to attend law school after graduation with a focus on public interest and advocacy.

By Samuel Reece

It took a long time for me to decide that I really loved Alabama. The complicated and the difficult kept me from really, truly loving my home state, despite a childhood's worth of humid summers and mosquito bites, despite attending the state's flagship university, and despite many sunny afternoons spent with a basket of Chilton County peaches. What made me really, truly, love my home state was seeing Alabamians – here by birth or by choice or both – intent on loving it, on making it a better place, and on caring for the Alabama present in their communities and relationships.

The 2019 Burt Jones Rural Community Experience – through the Eastern Black Belt and the communities of Eufaula, Phenix City, Tuskegee, and Union Springs – was a trip through a part of the state I'd only ever been familiar with in passing. But it was an Alabama I recognized instantly. Union Springs is an Alabama where community is strong, where family businesses like Bonnie Plants can credit their success to their deep roots and relationships, where communities can gather at a place like the Red Door Theatre and enjoy each other's company and each other's art. Union Springs is an Alabama where the most complicated and difficult parts of Alabama's past and present – the ideologies

and practices of white supremacy and the struggles that continue against them – are juxtaposed, highlighted, and brought together by a community's ability to draw itself into something more than the sum of its parts. And, as I think tends to happen on the rural travel experience, visiting Union Springs gave me a sense of the complicated and difficult and powerful bonds that had already begun to form so strongly within our Blackburn class. Like Union Springs and like Alabama, we ventured into community with each other, with all the hard stuff on the table. We began to try and talk about it, and we did some things right and some things wrong.

Eufaula was an Alabama that was totally and completely in the present. We found in Eufaula an Alabama of technological innovation in education policy (as the home base of Alabama Virtual Academy), a place where remnants of racist educational and cultural divides have created injustice for generations, and a place where Alabamians were kind and brave enough to talk to us about those failings and successes. It is an Alabama with stunning antebellum homes and concentrated wealth, an Alabama where past and present and future are contained and connected. It is a place where my Blackburn class got

to talking about legacy, about history, about today and yesterday and tomorrow, and where we found ourselves just as rooted in the past and just as powerfully straining towards the future as the people of Eufaula.

By the time we got to Phenix City, we knew what we were doing. We had spent a lot of time listening to Alabamians, listening to each other, and trying to process it all. We were tired - I was tired - but tired in the way that means you are more present for everything happening around you. If Union Springs and Eufaula had been about the encompassing of diverse ideas and people into communities of the past and present and future, Phenix City was about finding the edges of communities, and still, still, reaching over those edges to find some connecting force. We thought about what it means to look at public policy across geographic and political lines, and about where communities try and help those who fall through cracks - like Alabama's foster care system. I felt as if I'd moved on from being just someone in the state of Alabama, a student in the Blackburn Institute, to an Alabamian, aware of all our ridges and rises, aware of the fact that only in dialogue and communication and community could I see something like the true outline of the living, breathing thing that is my home state.

Finally, in Tuskegee there was hope. The Tuskegee Airmen gave me hope, for an Alabama where courage and heroism can be valued, where Alabamians and Americans can stand

together for justice everywhere. Fred Gray and the Tuskegee Human Rights and Multicultural Center gave me hope for an Alabama where the crimes of the past are remembered, and where we demand they never happen again. Macon County Schools, and the incredible things they are able to do for their students, gave me hope. The students who so graciously hosted us at Tuskegee University gave me hope for an Alabama where students and young people have common visions and concerns for the future of our state. Tuskegee is an Alabama, I left having decided, that is dedicated not just to caring for each other but to caring for each other better.

All those complicated, messy, and difficult parts of the state rode with me, with us, through the Rural Travel Experience. But they were, if not overshadowed, joined by something else that has always bubbled up under the surface of this state but that I had never seen in its entirety. I saw, in full color, a version of this place that was filled with Blackburn students and Fellows and Advisory Board Members, and with people like them. A version of this place that is complicated and messy and difficult and striving, in every place, to do more, to do better, all because the people here love it for being so difficult and messy and for always doing more. And inside the bus, inside the Blackburn office, on campus, I started to see all those versions of Alabama, all those Alabamians. It was hard then not to fall in love with the state, not to admit - finally - that there was nothing I could do but be swept along by all of it, and to really love Alabama at last. 🌿





Fostering *Change*

Daniel Community Scholars

Lauren Chambliss is a senior from Prattville, Alabama studying environmental engineering. She is a member of Capstone Men and Women, The XXXI Women's Honorary, and the Anderson Society. She has worked with the Tuscaloosa County Department of Human Resources for several years through their quarterly community partnership meetings, and she served as the original chair of their meal program for foster children and families. She is also a Dare to Dream mentor with Tuscaloosa Angels. Lauren enjoys going on walks and reading in her spare time, and she plans to attend law school upon graduation.

By Lauren Chambliss

I have had a passion for improving the lives and contributing to the growth of foster children since high school when a trip overseas opened my eyes to the needs of parentless children. I was fortunate to grow up with two supportive and engaged parents, and the exposure I had on that trip caused me to realize that children in my own community do not always have the same experience.

The Blackburn Institute has provided me with an incredible avenue to further my involvement in foster care through the Daniel Community Scholars (DCS) Program. This year's DCS Project included two events with the common goal of increasing the number of available foster homes in Tuscaloosa and the state of Alabama. My DCS team of five Blackburn students recognized our shared passion, and we began our research focused on abuse and neglect in the foster care system. However, as we completed the research phase of our proposal, it became clear that one of the largest hurdles to the welfare of foster youth is the shortage of local foster families.

As of February 2020, there were 137 children compared to 41 available foster homes in Tuscaloosa County according to the Tuscaloosa County Department of Human Resources. This shortfall leads to children being placed out of county, introducing further instability and isolation into their lives as they are forced to change schools and live hours away from family members. Additionally, sibling groups are separated if there are no homes available to take the number of children necessary to keep siblings together. The shortage also hinders social workers from making placements based on best fit of the child and a given family, as there are only limited options available. We learned that contributing factors to the lack of willing foster families include a diminished awareness of the need for homes and a frustration with the laborious and prolonged process to become a certified foster family. Our project sought to address both causes with a two-pronged approach.

The first event held was a Foster Care Informational Summit with the purpose of answering questions from community

members on the process to become foster parents. The Tuscaloosa County Department of Human Resources (DHR) was a logical community partner for this event due to their role in administering the foster care system. Their presentation at the Informational Summit outlined the foster parent licensing process, and they also provided us with necessary background information and statistics for our research and promotional materials. The event continued with a presentation by Tuscaloosa Angels, a local branch of a national non-profit committed to supporting foster youth and families through consistent engagement and mentoring programs. They spoke about ways, other than directly fostering, that community members can support foster youth and families. Tuscaloosa Angels also promoted our events through their social media channels and word of mouth, increasing attendance of local community leaders. The final segment of the event was a foster parent panel composed of former and current foster parents that shared their experiences and answered questions. Following the presentations, guests could visit the booths of Tuscaloosa County DHR, Tuscaloosa Angels, and many other organizations with ties to foster care to learn how to get further involved. As a result of the Foster Care Informational Summit ten families signed up to begin classes to become certified foster parents, creating the largest licensing class for prospective foster parents in Tuscaloosa County to date.

The second event held was a roundtable discussion in which Rescue 100, an initiative of the Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services (CPS), shared about their streamlined foster care licensing process. Rescue 100 consolidates the licensing process to include online modules and a one-day training workshop to certify new foster families more efficiently. Mississippi Supreme Court Justice Dawn Beam, Harrison County Youth Court Judge Michael Dickinson, Pastor Tony Karnes, and other CPS officials attended as Mississippi's foster care delegation to contribute to the conversation around what can be done to streamline the licensing process in Alabama. Alabama DHR

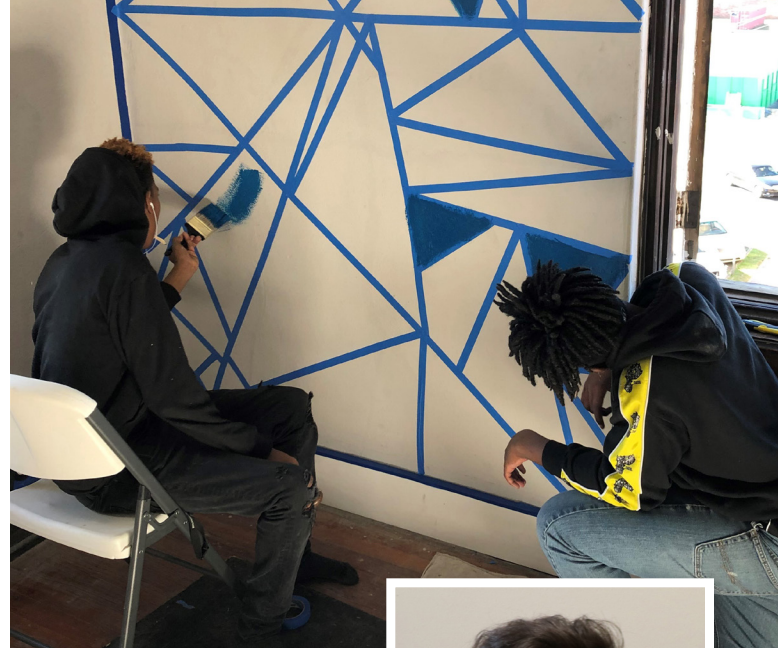
Commissioner Nancy Buckner as well as other members of her staff also attended the event and gave a presentation outlining our current licensing process. Following both presentations, we facilitated a conversation about the barriers to implementing a similar streamlined process in Alabama. Attendees asked many questions concerning the logistics of Rescue 100's program, and discussed numerous ideas for making Alabama's process more accessible.

Implementing this year's Daniel Community Scholars (DCS) project with the 2019 Blackburn Class was an invaluable experience for me in following through with an idea from its inception to its completion. As I learned more and more about foster care (with still so much to learn), my preconceived ideas were challenged, and I began to see the merit in various stakeholders' perspectives. It is crucial that the safety of foster children is at the forefront of any initiative, and it contributed to my own growth to hear and consider the ideas of those who are most knowledgeable about the foster care system. The research, communication, and relationship-building skills that I have been encouraged to stretch will certainly be of use in similar projects to come. I hope to continue to leverage the relationships formed with DHR both locally and state-wide to see some of the ideas that were discussed at the Roundtable Discussion come to fruition. The positive results from our Informational Summit are extremely encouraging and show the incredible potential that lies in partnering with governmental agencies as individuals and community members. This project confirmed my calling to work with foster care, particularly by supporting the DHR's work, while also encouraging new ideas in that realm. The importance of community involvement was underscored throughout the project, and it is my desire to see partnerships that exist in Tuscaloosa replicated throughout the state. I intend to maximize the momentum and conversations initiated during our DCS project by pursuing innovative solutions in caring for our youth in the foster care system. 🌱



Ensley Students Engage in a New Mentoring and Support Program

By Stephen Grover



Stephen Grover earned his undergraduate degree from the University of Alabama, majoring in Social Entrepreneurship through the New College in 2019. During his time at UA, he was heavily involved in advocating for student voter rights and encouraging civic engagement through Vote Everywhere. Stephen now leads expansion efforts at Build UP, serving as the Director of Learning & Expansion. He also joined the Venture For America fellowship in Birmingham, Alabama, and is currently one year into his two year fellowship.



Build UP's mission is to empower youth, families and communities to lift themselves out of poverty and public-assistance living by equipping youth to: acquire a self-directed, career-focused education; gain knowledge and skills in a high-demand field of their choosing; own homes and rental properties to build personal wealth and earn passive income, thus creating an economic and social safety net to then collectively lead the longer-term revitalization of their home communities.

During the 2019-2020 academic year, Build UP began a daily in-school mentoring and support program called E-Units, which stands for employability units. These advisory groups serve as a stable, consistent touchstone for monitoring the emotional growth and mental health of Build UP youth. Five to seven students are assigned to an adult role model and regularly meet with them to discuss anything, whether it be school-related or personal. This fosters a relationship

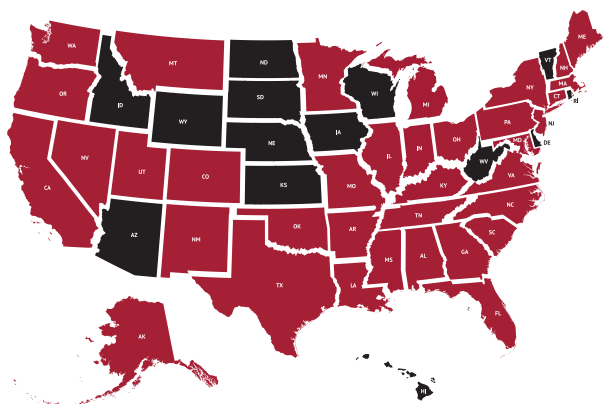
between the mentor and student which encourages trust, openness, and support, which many of our students are lacking in their home lives.

Build UP utilized grant funds from the Blackburn Institute's Daniel Community Scholars Program to build out the E-Unit rooms, research and develop daily and weekly curriculum for the academic school year, and train teachers to assess and lead student emotional growth. Each room (7 total) was designed, renovated, and customized by the students. Students utilized their apprenticeship learning as well as active teamwork to create a personalized safe space where they meet daily to build community. Teachers researched and developed activities throughout the year which engaged students in critical thinking, team building, and effective communication skills. A few student activities included: an egg drop challenge, a "revitalize the school" poster challenge, and a holiday decoration competition. Lastly, funds

were used to bring students on several relevant field trips, including a day trip to the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama and a screening of Just Mercy.

Build UP's personalized educational model meets youth where they are academically and socioemotionally, which can be up to nine years below grade level. In addition to a high school diploma and an associate's degree, students receive workforce training and earn certifications and credentials, each of which require greater instructional and financial investment. Build UP believes that demography is not destiny. We look past the statistics to see the people and potential of the community we serve. We see Ensley and neighborhoods like it across Alabama as places for innovative, engaging education that leads to economic revitalization. Led by educated, empowered youth, this revitalization will be of the community, for the community, and sustained for years to come. 🌱

WHERE ARE THE BLACKBURN FELLOWS?



UNITED STATES

681

ABROAD

15

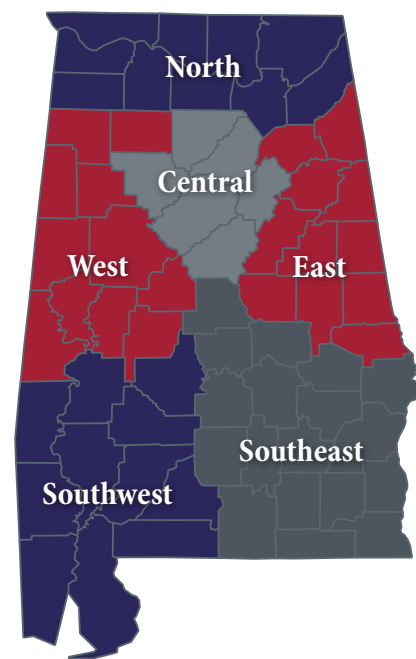
TOP U.S. LOCATIONS
OUTSIDE OF ALABAMA

Georgia (52)

Texas (40)

DC (36)

Tennessee (34)



CENTRAL
(149)

Blount, Cullman, Jefferson,
St. Clair, Shelby, Walker

WEST
(58)

Bibb, Fayette, Greene,
Hale, Lamar, Marion, Perry,
Pickens, Sumter, Tuscaloosa,
Winston

NORTH
(44)

Colbert, DeKalb, Franklin,
Jackson, Lauderdale,
Lawrence, Limestone,
Madison, Marshall, Morgan

SOUTHEAST
(38)

Autauga, Barbour, Bullock,
Butler, Chilton, Coffee,
Covington, Crenshaw, Dale,
Elmore, Geneva, Henry,
Houston, Lowndes, Macon,
Montgomery, Pike, Russell

SOUTHWEST
(15)

Baldwin, Choctaw, Clarke,
Conecuh, Dallas, Escambia,
Marengo, Mobile, Monroe,
Washington, Wilcox

EAST
(10)

Calhoun, Chambers,
Cherokee, Clay, Cleburne,
Coosa, Etowah, Lee,
Randolph, Talladega,
Tallapoosa

Blackburn Institute

2020 Pinned Fellows

Joseph Ballard
Faith Barringer
Jackson Bryant
Mae Crumbley
Jay Cunningham
Jacob Dennis
Isabella DeSheplo
Sydney Gabrielson
Sashas Godfrey
Olivia Grace Howell
Jo Greene
Noah Avery Greene
Sumona Gupta
Elise Helton
Jade Hill
Marquis Hollingsworth
Camille Howarth
Jeffrey Jones
Matthew Kiszla
Kendall Kruchten
Kathryn Lahr
Clayton Lawing

Ben Leonard
Belle LouAllen
Pedram Maleknia
Danielle McAllister
Cassie McCarley
Megan McCrory
Bennett McGehee
Becca Michel
Shana Oshinski
Hani Razavi
Christopher Robinson
Jeff Rogers
Joshua Smalley
Olivia Smith
Alexis Smith
Caroline Smith
Ben Stansell
Juliana Strobing
Trey Sullivan
Chance Tudor
Harrison Turner
Ally Williams
Courtney Zotaj



KENNEY WASHINGTON: BEING AT THE WRONG PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME

Major Kenneth Washington was a member of the first Blackburn class in 1994. He graduated from The University of Alabama in 1996 with a BS in political behavior and financial systems and commissioned as an officer in the United States Army. He holds Master's degrees from Alabama A&M University in Education (2014) and The University of Alabama in Huntsville in Cybersecurity (2019). He currently serves as the Deputy Division Chief for Facilities and Housing at the Headquarters for the U.S. Army Materiel Command (AMC) where his duties include oversight of housing procedures and processes, construction, restoration and modernization, community initiatives, and staffing.

I believe in being at the wrong place at the right time, because if you were in the right place, there would be no need for you. I also recognize that whenever I have found myself in these wrong places, I have been fortunate to be supported by individuals, families, and organizations who were generous with their time, knowledge, and resources. They spurred me on and supported me throughout my journey.

Certainly, the first family that I am thankful for is my own. I was an only child and deeply loved. My extended family is diverse, and I benefitted from being exposed to difference from a young age. I come from a long line of preachers, teachers, Soldiers, and community organizers, and I continue that legacy as the fourth generation to serve in the military. Faith is also important to us, and it remains my guide.

How I came to The University of Alabama is definitely an example of right timing. I'm a Louisiana import, moving near Huntsville in high school. After graduation, I was ready to start at Oral Roberts University. But on the way out west, my family was convinced to make a detour to Tuscaloosa because my parents' pastor colleague felt in his gut that we needed to. We arrived at Rose Administration, and Mr. Claude Hutcherson, assistant director of admissions, ran into us in the hallway. He greeted us warmly, got us on the 2 p.m. bus tour starting in minutes, and encouraged us to return to his office to talk more.

We fell in love with the campus through the Capstone Woman's descriptions. The ability to create my own interdisciplinary major especially enticed me. After the tour, Mr. Hutcherson spent hours recruiting us. Although classes

had already started, he offered me a Presidential scholarship and the opportunity to apply to New College. In an instant, Mama's prayers were answered.

During my time at the Capstone, Mr. Hutcherson continued to mentor and even feed me if need be. He introduced me to goals I should aspire to like graduating on the mound and organizations I should join. He hired me, when I was very grateful for the money, to retool the minority student recruitment program. After our student focus group pinpointed why numbers were down, we tripled admissions.

In 1994, my sophomore year, social tensions flared on campus. Nathan Bedford Forest IV (possibly a relative of the Confederate lieutenant general bearing the same name) filed a petition to start a student group called The Southern League, a pro-southern heritage organization. Coincidentally, that year UA also experienced cross burnings, protests, and physical attacks on marginalized students.

One day, maybe when I was finishing a tour as a Capstone Man, Nathan and I found ourselves in the same place on campus. He struck up a conversation with me. Surprisingly, we kept meeting. In light of this unexpected friendship, my New College advisor, Dr. Robert McKenzie, and his supervisor, current Blackburn Advisory Board Member Dr. David Mathews, introduced me to Dr. Blackburn. They encouraged me to keep talking. Relationships foster change.

1994 was also the inaugural year of the Blackburn Institute. I applied, interviewed, and was selected. My most powerful student memory is from that fall when the first Blackburn class decided to hash out ideas with Southern League

members over dinner. Senior Blackburn students organized the forum, which was a scripted discussion mediated by faculty.

The dinner conversation left us Blackburn students exhausted, terrified, and angry. Some even left midway through the event. On the bright side, we also came away with an energized sense of purpose. We wouldn't stand for injustice on campus. Enduring that event became something positive for myself and others. We became unafraid to open ourselves up to experiencing and tackling hard problems. I'd like to think that Dr. Blackburn was proud, and I know the administration took note.

The Barnes family also significantly contributed to my academic success. Their son, Samuel Thomas Barnes IV, was tragically murdered while working as a young staffer for Senator Howell Heflin in DC. As I was among the first to receive the scholarship endowed in their son's name, the family personally presented it to me. I will be forever grateful that it allowed me to intern with Terry Everett, Representative to Congress from Alabama's 2nd Congressional District. With the support of these individuals and others, I graduated from the New College majoring in political behavior and financial systems with a depth study in inequality through financial structures. My senior thesis advisor was Mr. James Hood.

Since then, the U.S. Army empowered me to complete two Master's degrees and provided me with countless career choices. The Headquarters for the U.S. Army Materiel Command (AMC) at Redstone Arsenal, where I currently serve, manages logistics and sustains readiness across the globe. Its over 190k members provide everything from housing to bullets, and during the COVID-19 pandemic our duties now include enabling DoD medical capabilities and a complex medical material supply chain, while still supporting the Warfighter. Our current situation means long hours with all hands on deck, but it's also thrilling to work with folks with the ingenuity, dedication, and energy needed for executable solutions.

Today, my family continues to be a strength. My wife, Julie, is the lioness of our pride, blessed with both brilliance and backbone. She held down a military household while working

a multimillion-dollar portfolio in her own career. We also have two beautiful 21-year-old daughters, MaKaylla and Bailey. My mother lives close by and remains a community organizer. My dad, the cornerstone, keeps me grounded. Not to mention, I have two of the best stepparents, Kathy and Anthony, that one could ever ask for. I'm immensely proud of all of them and the value they add to the world.

I reconnected with the Blackburn and Mathews families at the 25th Annual Symposium. It was rewarding to revitalize these old ties, but I wish I had more time with the Blackburn classes following mine. The Fellows and students I did speak with were civically minded, bright, and talented. I want to know their causes, and I hope they know each other's. Whenever someone in Blackburn or the greater community rings the alarm bell, Fellows should come running. Life doesn't stop when we leave campus, so we all must work to have the platform and the resources to contribute when we are called.

My favorite quote, especially in this season, is from Winston Churchill. I learned it from General Gus Perna, AMC Commanding General. "It's not enough for you to do your best. You must succeed at doing what is necessary." To me, that means the number of degrees you've earned and your accomplishments don't matter. What does matter is doing what is necessary and required without getting hung up on if it's good enough. We have to be willing to do the hard work in our spheres of influence when it is needed and conceivably might go unnoticed. Competence and completion over competition.

Dr. Blackburn always asked us what we are doing. That's a verb, not a noun. To combat injustice, we have to be "in justice." We must do things that are necessary, not deflect or defer them to others. Every problem has a solution. Every lock needs a key. We need to be the ones to give money, start the soup kitchen, or do whatever is needed, especially when we find ourselves in the wrong place at the right time. Because the wrong place at right time is exactly where we, as Fellows, need to be. 🌳



Kenneth Wayne Washington II

Kenneth Wayne Washington II, born on March 2, 1974, from Huntsville, Alabama, a senior majoring in Pre-Law/Accounting. Student activities and honors include: Capstone Men and Women; New College Executive Council, President and Vice President; New College Admission Committee; New College Honors Day Committee; The Other Club; Unite Week Committee; Alpha Lambda Delta; Lambda Sigma; Phi Eta Sigma; Independent Involvement Council; Golden Key; Mortar Board; Anderson Society; Omicron Delta Kappa; University Chorus; Kid's Crusaders; Faculty Advisor; Intern, Rep. Everett; Robert G. Chollar Fellow, Capturing Foundation; Carl A. Elliott Society; Campus Crusade for Christ; Reformed University Fellowship; The New College Review; Presidential scholar; Outstanding academic achievement as an African-American; University of Alabama Truman Scholarship nominee; Charter student fellow of the Blackburn Institute; Who's Who Among College Students; Outstanding service to New College as an officer; Samuel Thomas Barnes IV Memorial Scholarship.

After graduation from the University of Alabama, I plan to pursue my master's degree in public administration, as well as a law degree. From there, I will pursue an active life in politics on a state, as well as on a national level.

My most significant contribution to the University of Alabama community has been through Capstone Men and Women. The program allows me the opportunity to give back to an institution that has provided me with a formal education, a quality legation even as a Constant.

Making Networking Through the Generations Easy

By Kathryn Drago

Coordinator of Blackburn Alumni Programs



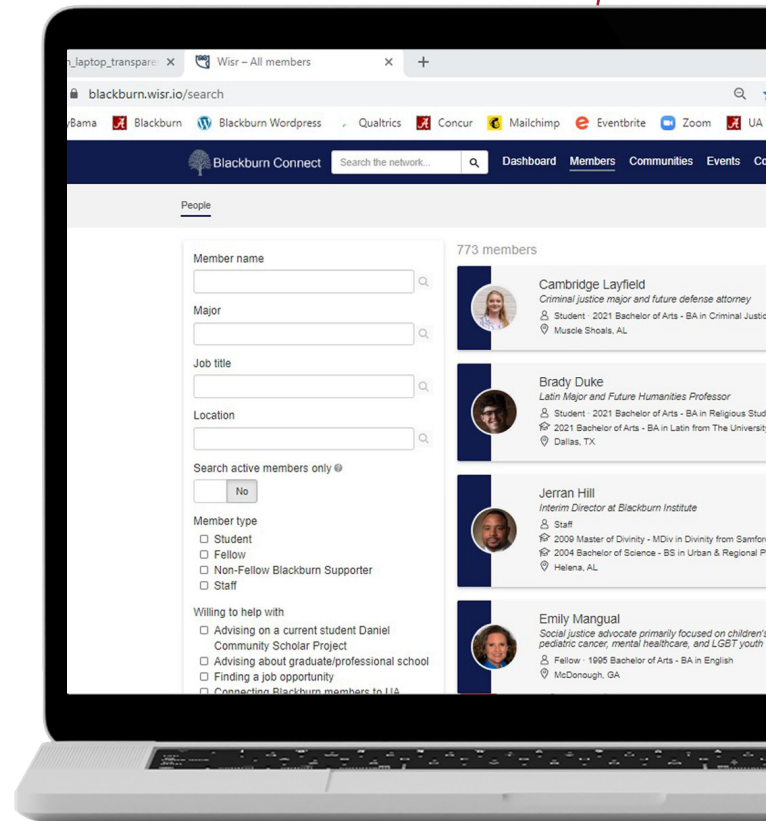
This year, the Blackburn Institute turns 26 years old. We currently boast 3 staff, 50 new students, 53 returning students, 704 Fellows, 69 Advisory Board Members (some of whom are also Fellows), and 33 Society Members (again, some of whom are Fellows or current AB Members). With nearly 900 individuals, we are well-positioned to do great works. But to leverage the full power of the network, we needed a

more agile, user-friendly, and secure mechanism for building relationships and making connections.

Inspired by a desire to better live by our value of “networking through the generations,” in May and June 2020 we introduced Blackburn Connect (<https://blackburn.wisr.io>). The adoption of this online networking platform marked the culmination of a lengthy effort to find a secure, robust, user-friendly, and cost-effective service that would fulfill our community’s needs.

In 2019, Interim Director Jerran Hill attended a professional development conference session about a connection platform used by Stanford University alumni. With this information as a starting point, Jerran investigated what UA’s Office of Information Technology could build. We ultimately explored services and negotiated competitive subscription plans from three online networking companies.

Our decision depended heavily on input from our community. During focus groups, Blackburn Fellows made clear that connecting with community members in their profession and/or local area was a priority. They also evaluated the three

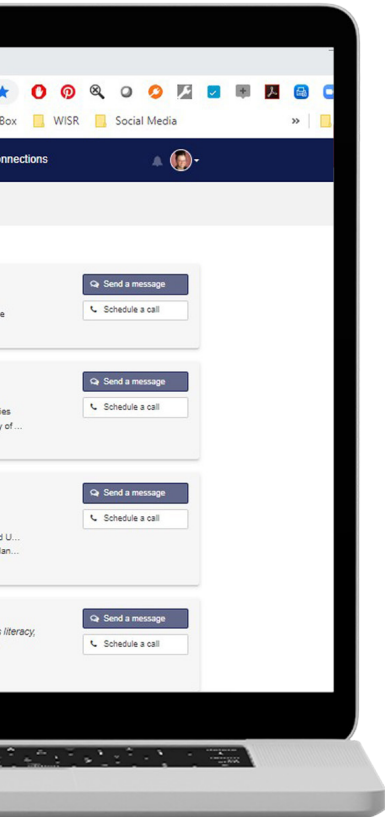


companies’ offerings. Advisory Board member Alex Smith and Fellows Involvement Network Officers, James Kemp, Caroline Shook, and Ben Jackson, received demos from company executives. Finally, UA administrators vetted data handling procedures to ensure that they met high security and privacy standards.

We ultimately chose to build our digital community with Wizr (<https://getwizr.com/>) because, as a startup company focusing on student and alumni engagement, they had the ability to tailor a platform to the Blackburn Institute’s unique needs while keeping costs low.

“The Blackburn Institute has been amazing to work with. We love to roll up our sleeves with passionate teams, and the Blackburn Institute is a perfect example.

Small, but powerful programs like the Institute build massive affinity for an institution and are a crucial component to institutions like The University of Alabama,” said Wisr co-founder and COO John Knific.



We are thrilled about Blackburn Connect for many reasons. First, the onboarding process is quick and can be connected to LinkedIn, with questions that enable the platform to suggest connections between members who might help each other to achieve professional and civic goals. Second, members can update their own profiles and customize privacy settings for each attribute.

Third, the membership database contains all current staff, students, Fellows, and non-Fellow supporters (e.g. current AB Members or Society Members who were not Fellows). Users can find one another by name, major, job, location, Blackburn class, or volunteer goal. Fourth, Blackburn Connect makes reaching out simple with emailing and call scheduling conducted right through the platform. In addition, site administrators can suggest and follow relationships between users, which will streamline the oversight of mentoring in the future.

Finally, Communities on Blackburn Connect function as discussion boards where users can post questions, links

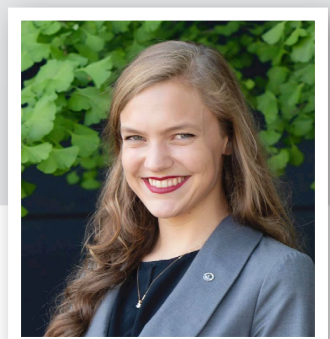
to articles, video, and files. Anyone can post in the Communities (Virtual Front Porch, Blackburn Events around the Globe, Alabama Policy News Talk, Race and Justice Conversations, and Job and Leadership Opportunities), and volunteering as a Community leader is a meaningful way to participate with the network. Email digests keep Community members from missing conversation and events, and users can modify the frequency of these notifications.

Our community has readily embraced Blackburn Connect, with 71 students, 240 Fellows, and 16 Non-Fellow supporters active at the end of July. We look forward to growth in membership and activity for years to come. Join this thriving network (<https://blackburn.wisr.io/signup/>), and easily network through the generations. Use Blackburn Connect to enrich your own work, give back to the Institute, and team up with others to answer the call to action. 🌱

STUDENT TESTIMONIAL

Blackburn Connect is an amazing initiative on the Blackburn staff's behalf. I'm so glad they've begun this program, especially now that it is so difficult to network in person. Exchanging thoughts and ideas with fellow Blackburn enthusiasts is such an incredible opportunity for all in the Blackburn family, and I've had great fun in connecting with people on the platform. Many thanks to the staff for pulling this program together, I can't wait to see it help us continue to uplift Alabama.

Tana Early
2019 Student Class





ADVISORY BOARD *Spotlight*

Q&A with Alex Smith

Since his graduation with a marketing degree from The University of Alabama in 1985, Alex had remained steadfast with his support and involvement of many facets of UA. Having served as president of the Atlanta alumni chapter in 1996, as well as president of the National Alumni Association (NAA) in 2016, his main volunteer involvement has always been student recruitment. He hosted numerous college fairs and events in the Atlanta area and is thrilled that Georgia has become the number one feeder state for the University, helping comprise many of its honor students. Alex and Donna recently moved back to Tuscaloosa after 30 years in Atlanta when Alex was named president of the NAA. Their move back to Tuscaloosa has allowed both to become more intimately involved in campus-related organizations such as the Blackburn Institute, the Culverhouse College of Business, and the Athletic Department's 1st and Ten Club, as well as the local Tuscaloosa alumni chapter. On the professional side, Alex built his career in the financial services industry. After working as a financial advisor for Smith Barney and UBS for several years, Alex became a consultant. He started A. Smith Consulting in 2002, focusing on the advisory team dynamic within the industry. He offers marketing, client service, and practice valuation services to advisory teams across the country. His experience and organizational skills also enable him to continue to support students and university causes alike in the areas of public speaking, corporate interviews, and professional development.

How did you become involved with Blackburn?

When I served as president of the National Alumni Association in 2016-17, Donna and I spent quite a bit of time in Tuscaloosa although we lived in Atlanta. We were very fortunate to meet and become friends with Carol and Tom Patterson and Gina and Mike House. Both couples were very instrumental in the development and growth of the Blackburn Institute since its inception in 1994. They quickly became aware of my affinity for The University of Alabama, the City of Tuscaloosa, and the State of Alabama and my desire to support the civic causes associated with each entity. The Blackburn Institute was a natural fit for me, and I've never looked back.

What would you say has been the most meaningful experience as a member of the Advisory Board?

The Daniel Community Scholars program has been one of the more impressive experiences I've observed. Watching the students break into several teams, identifying individual community causes, and then voting on a top cause for the whole class to support is a great combination of teamwork, entrepreneurial leadership, and civic engagement. The winning team makes a significant impact by advancing key awareness and solutions for a specific community need. It is Blackburn at its best.

How have your life experiences informed your passions for civic engagement?

During my collegiate tenure at UA, I was not as passionate about civic engagement as Blackburn students are today. However, my freshman year of college was at Marion Military Institute in Perry County, Alabama, and I was suddenly exposed to one of the poorest counties in the state. This time period left an impression on me. Later in early adulthood, I consciously became involved in Georgia Special Olympics, the Chattahoochee Riverkeeper, and the Atlanta Homeward Choir in conjunction with the homeless men's shelter at the Catholic Shrine of the Immaculate Conception church. All of these causes gave me a foundation to help serve any community in which I lived.

Health, education, equality, medical, and child advocacy issues still need a loud voice, and more importantly, a cohesive approach. The Blackburn Institute is positioned to play a larger role.

How have you engaged with students, Fellows, and other Advisory Board members in West Alabama?

Since our arrival to Tuscaloosa and involvement in the Blackburn Institute in 2016, I have intentionally tried to stay involved with the students, staff, Fellows, and Advisory Board members. I've attended the 2020 Daniel Community Scholars Foster Care roundtable discussions, nominated students and participated in the selection process as an essay reader, and attended new student class Small Group Values Discussions. Besides

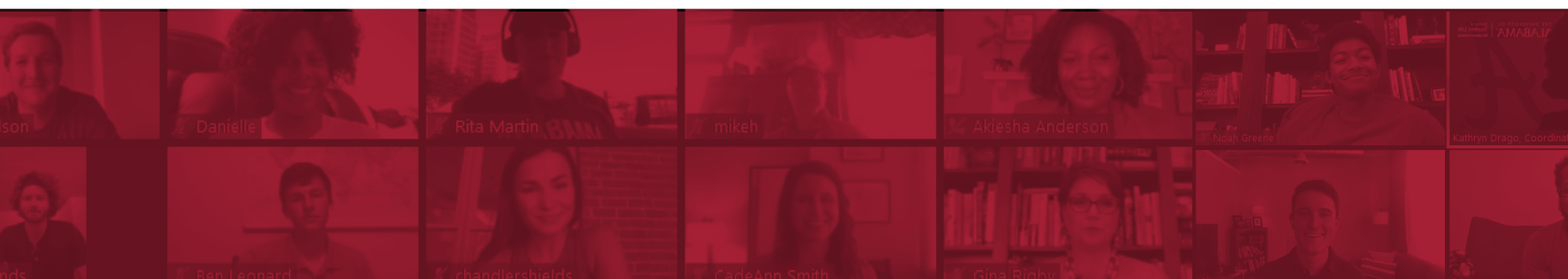
additional networking groups, Symposium gatherings, and Blackburn social events, I've also engaged Blackburn enthusiasts with creative social occasions. Each year, Donna and I invite a small group to Carol and Tom Patterson's skybox, which further connects various friends of the Institute and allows more bonds to be built.

What unique lessons have you learned about leadership?

That's an excellent question. One stark revelation has been witnessing the ways young leadership makes its mark. During most of my time in Atlanta, I was working with other civic volunteers mainly in my age range. Here, the students and Fellows have exhibited most of the Blackburn leadership. The maturity, creativity, and fortitude have been more impressive than I imagined. Whether it's advancing a cause or initiating a controversial dialogue, our young leaders don't seem to be easily intimidated by much. That's a huge plus. A second revelation about leadership is how much patience has to be practiced to weave through all the institutional, political, administrative, and governmental considerations/roadblocks before genuine improvements can be implemented.

What role do you see the Blackburn Institute playing in the State of Alabama?

Now that the Fellows Involvement Network (FIN) of graduated students has developed a core nucleus throughout the state, I anticipate the next few years to be quite different from the first twenty-five years of the Blackburn Institute. Besides continuing to nurture the leaders of tomorrow, one of the Institute's main roles will now be to support the current students and Fellows with better connectivity, communication, and financial support (when available) so they can leverage their leadership talents toward particular regional and state needs. Health, education, equality, medical, and child advocacy issues still need a loud voice, and more importantly, a cohesive approach. The Blackburn Institute is positioned to play a larger role. 🌳



Online networking events provide silver lining during quarantine

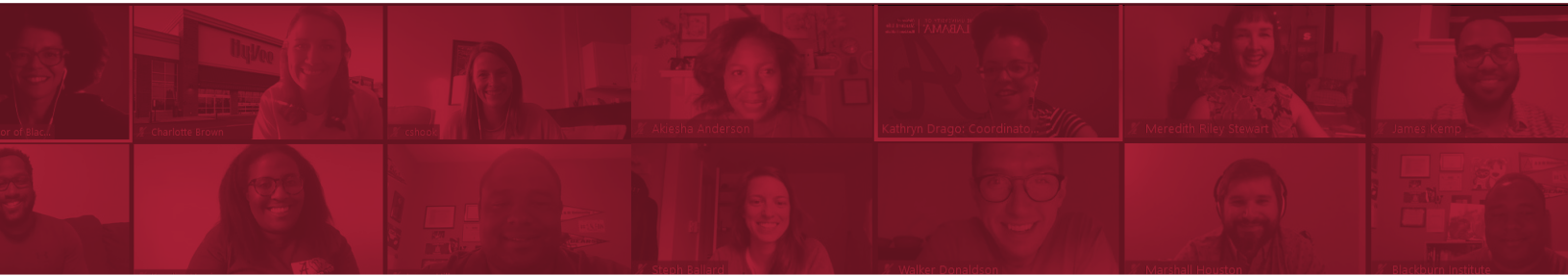
By Aaron Howard

"One major takeaway was that this model can work! Of course, there is no replacement for gathering together in person; however, as a supplemental form of connection and a way to cross great geographic distances, the virtual Summer Networking Events did the job."

Whether we gather at a nice restaurant, a local brewery, or the back of a pickup during football season, breaking bread together is a key component of what it means to be a part of the Blackburn Institute. Unfortunately, after graduation it is easy to miss out on these moments together. Our regional Summer Networking Events are a great way for Fellows to get reconnected and to stay involved as well as to meet current students and Advisory Board Members. Last year we had amazing results, a big thanks to Kathryn Drago, the Coordinator of Blackburn Alumni Programs. We had record attendance, and we saw a lot of faces that we had not seen in a while. So this year we were excited to build on that. As always, our goal was to bring the Blackburn community together from across the state and nation to reconnect, have meaningful conversations, and strengthen ties.

The aspirations we had for the Summer Networking Events this year changed when we realized the impact that COVID-19 would have. However, we did not let that stop us from giving students, Fellows, and AB members an outlet to network. We hosted all 13 Summer Networking Events in May, June, and July 2020 virtually through Zoom meetings. These events were regional gatherings, just like in person, but in more locales. We Zoomed to the familiar Washington, D.C., New York City, and everywhere in Alabama. Fellows also joined us from new cities across the nation including Denver, Colorado; Syracuse, New York; Augusta, Georgia; and Houston, Texas. At our international event, Fellows from across the globe were able to join together, which has never happened for Blackburn before!

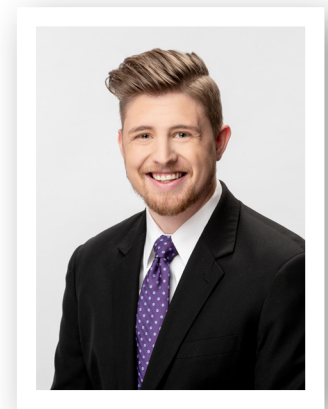
Zoom gave us the ability to reach Fellows who are geographically spread out (like in the western US), and many Fellows with families or other limitations for travel and availability were able to take part from the comfort of their homes.



Of course, the events looked a little different this year. We couldn't naturally break into smaller groups and catch up on life or reminisce on old times. With Zoom, we needed a structure to make sure every voice was heard and, maybe more importantly, that we weren't awkwardly talking over one another. I was a little skeptical about how this would work, but every attendee I talked to seemed to be pleasantly surprised. We started with brief introductions to break the ice. Then we answered trivia questions about how the Institute has impacted us from favorite events to career paths. Of course, this sparked several organic conversations from members who had a story or unique experience to share. We also caught up on current developments in the Institute via a brief report.

I think one of the most impactful parts of the night was when we broke off into groups to discuss what more we wanted as Fellows and reported our ideas back to the incoming FIN (Fellows Involvement Network) officers in attendance. Zoom facilitated the breakout rooms where the attendees could talk one-on-one. Many of these conversations ended up being as much about our personal lives as what we would like to see happen with the FIN.

One major takeaway was that this model can work! Of course, there is no replacement for gathering together in person; however, as a supplemental form of connection and a way to cross great geographic distances, the virtual Summer Networking Events did the job. These events showed us why it is so important to continue to innovate and find new "tables" to gather around as we remind ourselves and each other of the mission that we all share. It makes me excited, not just for the many local connections that will last beyond this summer, but also for the future opportunities we will have to dig our roots deeper and spread our branches farther as we network together, students, Fellows, and Advisory Board Members, continually working to "Change the damn state!" 🌱



Aaron Howard graduated from UA in 2016 with a double major in finance and economics. Upon graduation he was a part of a leadership and entrepreneurship training program at Chick-fil-A back in his hometown of "The Shoals" in northwest Alabama. However, instead of pursuing store ownership, as he originally planned, he decided to stay in Alabama and pursue a career in financial advising. He now works at a local firm in Huntsville called Cloud Financial that specializes in retirement planning. He is also involved in his local church, Chapel, which has a strong focus on making an impact in the local community through its food bank, drug rehab, and student tutoring/mentorship programs. He and his wife, Layla, live in Tusculumbia and are proud owners of two German Shepherds, Mozart and Mona Lisa. Their family is about to get a little bit bigger! They are expecting a baby boy, Caanan Ray Howard, in late August.



An action plan **TO STRENGTHEN THE FIN COMMUNITY**

By Akiesha Anderson

The Fellows Involvement Network (FIN) serves to advance the mission of the Blackburn Institute, connecting Fellows to each other, Blackburn students, and the Advisory Board as they carry out their lifetime commitment of acting as positive agents of change for Alabama and the nation. Upon graduation from The University of Alabama, Blackburn students automatically become FIN members. FIN officers lead Fellows programming by proposing, planning, and enacting initiatives, liaising with the Blackburn staff and Advisory Board, and promoting active participation in Blackburn activities. Fellows elected the current officers to serve a two-year term from August 2020 through July 2022.

What are the main projects the FIN is currently undertaking?

Olivia, Aaron, and I are excited about beginning our term as FIN officers. Over the next two years we have several great things in store! One of our initial programming priorities is to honor and build upon the great work of the former FIN officers by enhancing and continuing Blackburn's Soft Landings and Fellows Mentorship Programs. We will also continue to keep Fellows abreast of opportunities to engage with the Blackburn community as well as share Fellows' exciting life updates through Blackburn Today, the monthly Fellows newsletters.

During our term, we also hope to begin a few new initiatives, including but not limited to the following:

- 1. COVID-19 Relief:** We hope to highlight (via the monthly newsletter and other means) the great work that fellows and other community organizations have done in their communities to aid households impacted by COVID-19. We also plan to provide fellows with information on how they too can get involved with various COVID-relief efforts.
- 2. Race and Justice conversations:** As the Blackburn staff, Fellows, and Advisory Board members continue their

conversations about racial injustice within the nation, we are committed to being a part of those conversations and to helping to facilitate Fellow participation, reflection, learning, and thoughtful engagement in such.

3. Student to Fellow Pipeline: In addition to continuing the Soft Landings and Fellows Mentorship Programs, we also plan to explore additional ways to engage with Blackburn students throughout their final year of school. We believe that by connecting with Blackburn students in the months before they graduate, we can help make the transition from student to Fellow more seamless.

4. Blackburn Connect: If you haven't done so already, we encourage you to visit <https://blackburn.wisr.io/signup/> to activate your Blackburn Connect profile! In the coming months, we hope to utilize Blackburn Connect as a tool to engage more with Fellows as well as to help Fellows build interest-based community amongst each other.

Looking towards the future, we are excited about finding ways to continue to respond to the pressing issues of our times while strengthening relationships. To the extent that socially distancing remains a norm, we will also find ways to facilitate networking and community building opportunities using virtual channels.

How can fellows remain engaged with Blackburn and FIN?

This summer's virtual networking events were a huge success! As we as FIN officers met with and chatted with Blackburn Fellows throughout the world, a common sentiment that we encountered was that of Fellows (especially those located outside of Alabama) being interested in finding ways to remain connected to the Institute and each other despite distance. Over the coming months, we FIN officers will have numerous conversations to discuss ways to honor that request. We have already begun brainstorming several and ask you to stay tuned for future announcements regarding this topic. In the meantime, here are several of the pre-existing ways that Fellows can remain engaged and connected to both the Blackburn Institute and other FIN members:

- **Serve as a local (city-wide) or regional leader:** This opportunity is perfect for anyone that wants to serve as a point of contact or organizer for Blackburn networking and other events designed to build community by bringing nearby Fellows together
- **Become a mentor:** Help a current student or Fellow navigate the professional sphere
- **Ask to be a mentee:** Request to be paired with a Fellow who can help you navigate your professional (or graduate school) journey
- **Participate in the Soft Landings program:** Volunteer to serve as a resource willing to help Blackburn members adjust to or get settled into the city in which you reside
- **Highlight the work others are doing:** Know of any cool things that you, other Fellows, or organizations around you have done in response to COVID and their desire to leave a positive impact on their community? If so, please share with us! We would love to highlight these deeds as well as ways that others can assist with similar efforts
- **Continue to read the newsletter:** Be sure to keep an eye out for and read the monthly Blackburn Today Fellows newsletter as it will remain one of our main sources of communication between FIN members; also, please let us know if your email address changes or if you haven't been receiving this newsletter
- **Help us find Fellows:** Keep your contact information up-to-date as well as tell us if you know how to get in touch with any Fellows that the Institute might have lost touch with
- **Share any ideas you have:** If there is anything else that you would like to see as a Fellow, we'd love to hear from you! We welcome input from Fellows interested in sharing any thoughts, ideas, feedback, or concerns

If at any point you are interested in learning more about any of these opportunities, please feel encouraged to contact me via Blackburn Connect or email me at akiesha.anderson@gmail.com. I'm always happy to chat with Fellows and/or connect you with Olivia, Aaron, Jerran, or Kathryn. Thank you, and we look forward to working with you to create a FIN that best serves Fellows, Alabama, and all the other communities where we are represented. 🌱



Akiesha Anderson is a Montgomery, Alabama native. She received her law degree from The University of Alabama in 2017. She currently serves as the policy director for Alabama Appleseed Center for Law and Justice. In this role, she focuses on policy development, legislative advocacy, coalition building, engaging with elected officials, and assisting with Appleseed's legal projects. Prior to attending UA, Akiesha received a bachelor's degree in sociology from Alabama State University and a master's in degree in public administration from Auburn University-Montgomery. Upon completing her J.D., she also received a certificate in government affairs from UA Law. Over the years, she's had the honor of working with several civil rights organizations, elected officials, a university, and a think tank: the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR), Human Rights Campaign (HRC, U.S. Congresswoman Terri A. Sewell (AL-07), the Montgomery County Commission, UCLA School of Law, and the Williams Institute. Beyond the Blackburn Institute, Akiesha is also a member of several other community and service-oriented organizations including Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., the National Lawyers Guild, and the Montgomery Metro Chapter of the NAACP.



MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS

pay it forward, build relationships

Mentorship has been a cornerstone of the Blackburn Institute from the beginning. Throughout the years, many Fellows and Advisory Board Members have fulfilled their calling to network through the generations by seeking out mentees and offering their guidance. In addition to this organic mentoring, the Institute formally matches pairs of Fellows in the Soft Landings and Fellows Mentorship Programs. These programs engage Fellows no matter where they live and benefit mentors and mentees alike.

Soft Landings

Spearheaded by Rashmee Sharif in 2016, the goal of Soft Landings is to connect recently graduated students with Fellows living in their destination city. Relationships are tailored to the needs of the graduate as they transition to a new location. Each summer, the program matches around 30 pairs in cities such as Huntsville, Birmingham, New York, Washington D.C., Chicago, and even Oxford, England.

Dr. Marc Shook (2000 Fellow) living in Colombia, SC was eager to mentor Kristen Harris (2019 Fellow) during her move to Augusta, Georgia. “For me, it was another way to assist the Institute and fulfill Dr. Blackburn’s mission to promote networking through the generations,” he said. Marc connected Kristen with female engineers in his network (e.g. Joan Smith) and discussed everything from getting involved in the community to house-buying. Kristen was thankful for the support: “Knowing that I had a connection with Marc not very far away definitely helped in feeling more comfortable moving to a new place.”

Aspiring lawyer Jade Hill (2020 Fellow), currently interning with the Business Council of Alabama, reported that Birmingham trial attorney Angelica Agee Prince (2008 Fellow) was the perfect match. “She gave me some great advice about pursuing my career into law and ... her husband just recently opened up his own real estate law firm, which is what I was interested in.” Although they were not able to meet in person due to her being quarantined with her two small children, Angelica agreed that their relationship blossomed over the phone. “I am fortunate in that I’ve had countless individuals in my field, including other Blackburn fellows, be willing to offer me support, guidance, and advice. I want to do the same for Jade and look forward to continuing our mentor/mentee relationship. We are a great match!”

Fellows Mentorship Program

In the summer of 2019, the FIN officers led by James Kemp, piloted a new mentoring initiative connecting Fellows with a more experienced professional in

their field. In the Fellows Mentorship Program, pairs are expected to spend at least two hours per quarter for two years working toward the goals they create together. Nine mentees were matched with mentors in the first year of the program.

Mentee Sophia Warner (2019 Fellow) was paired with Olivia Bensinger (2014 Fellow). As a mentor, Olivia was “hoping to pay it forward by helping someone through the law school admissions process the way [she] had people help [her].” Despite the distance (Olivia lived in NYC when the pair matched, and now Sophia is in Germany on a Fulbright award), their relationship has grown. Sophia looks forward to tackling the law school admissions process together. “I know that Olivia will probably mark up my essays and give me lots of constructive edits— and I’ll definitely need them! Since writing is such a collaborative process, I am eager to work with Olivia to create a product that we can both be proud of,” Sophia said.

Over email, breakfast, or coffee, Washington D.C. associate attorney Evan Ward (2012 Fellow) mentored Georgetown University law student Elizabeth LaPaugh (2019 Fellow). Like many Fellows, he viewed mentorship as an opportunity to reengage with Blackburn after living outside of Alabama for years. “I was very appreciative to have Evan a few blocks down the street to ask questions of. When it came down to selecting an externship in the fall, Evan provided me thoughtful analysis of attributes firms would look for,” Elizabeth said. Evan speaks equally highly of the relationship. Mentoring a promising future lawyer has inspired him, and he looks forward to “seeing what Elizabeth does as she progresses in her young career” as she has already accomplished so much.

The Soft Landings and Fellows Mentorship Programs have been boons to both mentors and mentees. Mentors have embraced the opportunity to reconnect with the Institute no matter where they live, follow in their own mentor’s footsteps, and build ties with younger generations. Mentees have gained guidance, friendship, and peace of mind during uncertain times. To become a mentor or mentee in either program, please indicate these goals in your Blackburn Connect profile (<https://blackburn.wisr.io/>), and the office will be in contact in advance of matching you. 🌱



MANSBERG FOLLOWS IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF FELLOWS WITH *Horizon Award*



Emma Mansberg (*pictured bottom right*), Blackburn Class of 2018, was the 2020 recipient of the Realizing the Dream Horizon Award, an honor given each year to one student in the Tuscaloosa area who has made significant contributions to Dr. Martin Luther King's legacy. As an undergraduate, Emma served as the student chairperson of the Blackburn Institute from 2019 to 2020. In addition to her service to the Institute, she took part in the UA Crossroads Civic Leadership Dialogues program, participating in important discussions concerning civic engagement while engaging in student activism focusing on racial justice on campus. She was also involved in the Honors College, participating in the SaveFirst tax initiative in addition to serving as the director of civic engagement for the Honors College Assembly for two years. Additionally, she is an active member within the University's Jewish community and Bloom Hillel. Currently, Emma is pursuing a master's degree in women's studies at UA and will graduate in May 2021. After finishing her second degree, she hopes to attend law school where she can focus her passion for achieving racial justice in the field of civil rights and criminal justice.

Since 2009, a total of six members of the Blackburn community have received the Realizing the Dream Horizon Award. Kendra Key (*pictured middle left*), Blackburn Class of 2007, received the Horizon Award in 2009. She served as student chairperson of the Institute and president of the Mortar Board Honor Society. Currently, Kendra is an attorney serving as the senior vice president of community and economic development at HOPE Credit Union, a Montgomery nonprofit that combats economic inequality.

Sean Hudson (*pictured top left*), Blackburn Class of 2012, received the Horizon Award in 2011. On campus, Hudson focused upon advocacy work surrounding the foster care system and access to education, sitting on advocacy boards

that directly worked with the governor's office. Currently, Hudson is a part-time lecturer at the University of Chicago and the director of research and strategic planning at Truman College in Chicago. In his free time, he does advocacy work around Black trans issues and mentors LGBTQ youth attending college.

Elliot Spillers (*pictured bottom left*), Blackburn Class of 2015, received the 2017 Horizon Award in 2017. Spillers was elected SGA president in 2015, the second African-American to hold this post, nearly 40 years after Cleo Thomas' election in 1976. Elliot has worked for the past two years, as a justice fellow at the Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery.

Marissa Navarro (*pictured middle right*), Blackburn Class of 2017, was the recipient of the Horizon Award in 2018. She was founder and president of the Hispanic-Latino Association, which continues to support, represent, and grow the University's Latinx community. Marissa continues this work in her current role on the higher education team at the Center for American Progress, where she helps to create policies to ensure that every person can obtain affordable, quality higher education experience.

Quinvarlio "Quin" Kelly (*pictured top right*) received the Horizon Award in 2019, and in February 2020, Quin became a member of the Blackburn New Student Class. Quin is a graduate of Stillman College, where he served as president of the SGA from 2017 to 2018. He is pursuing a master's degree in public health at The University of Alabama, while serving as a graduate assistant with the Crossroads Civic Engagement Center and president of the University's Graduate Student Association. Quin has served as a board member for Child Abuse Prevention Services of Tuscaloosa and the Alabama Democratic Conference (ADC) and is a graduate of the 2019 class of Leadership Tuscaloosa. 🌳

SEPTEMBER

- **Anne Matthews** graduated with her master's degree from Vanderbilt's Leadership and Organizational Performance program.
- The Albert Schweitzer Fellowship - Alabama welcomed **Prince Cleveland** to its board of directors.
- **Creshema Murray** was promoted to associate professor of corporate communication at the University of Houston - Downtown.
- **Alexandra Smith** established an archives and records management consulting business called Yellowhammer Archival Services LLC that assists both individuals and organizations with preserving their history through proper records care, storage and documentation (reachable at YellowhammerArchives@gmail.com). She also recently passed the Certified Archivists exam.
- AB Member **John Saxon** was named to the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute's Board of Directors.
- **Mark Martin's** Build UP was selected as a finalist for the 2019 Magic City Makeover competition.
- Blackburn Fellows **Leigh Terry** and **John Brinkerhoff** got married August 17.
- **Katie Jernigan** has started an OB/GYN residency.

OCTOBER

- **Victoria Starks Nabors** and her husband, MAJ Marvin W. Nabors welcomed their twins, Starks Winston and Anna Elisabeth, into the world on July 29.
- **Jonathan Joyner** published his book entitled "The Hydra: Achieving Victory in Sri Lanka's Civil War."
- **Danielle Blevins** started as an Attorney-Advisor with the U.S. Department of Energy in Washington, D.C in the General Law Division.
- **Kyle Van Frank** started his new job as an acting apprentice at the Florida Studio Theatre in Sarasota, Florida, where he will be serving as an acting and improvisation intern, as well as a Teaching Artist across Southern Florida.
- **Alex Flachsbart**, CEO of Opportunity Alabama, was featured in an AL.com article titled "Alabama looking at \$1 billion from Opportunity Zone investments."
- **James Kemp** and his wife Jasmine welcomed their first child, a son named Jotham Michael Kemp, on September 28. James was also



named as a Rising Star in Real Estate by BBJ. (See picture)

NOVEMBER

- After working for over a year on her case, **Jilisa Milton** saw 72-year-old Geneva Cooley released from prison after being given a life sentence for a non-violent drug charge.
- Yellowhammer Multimedia published the 2019 Power & Influence 40 list recognizing the top individuals in Alabama government and politics. Included on the list are Fellows **Katie Boyd Britt**, **RB Walker**, and **Ben Patterson**.
- The Alabama Media group published its list of 30 Women Who Shape the State of Alabama for 2019. Included on the list is Fellow and AB member **Jenna Bedsole**.
- **Chris Saunders** was interviewed on WBHM about Alabama's cuts to higher education funding.

DECEMBER

- **Mark W. C. Martin** was honored at The Vulcans Community Awards with the Newcomer Award, presented by the Vulcan Park Foundation.
- **Will Sorrell** was recognized as the James Earl Massey Student Preaching Award winner as he completes his graduate studies at Beeson Divinity School of Samford University.
- **Robert Turner** was recognized as Tulsan of the Year for his work on racial reconciliation.

JANUARY

- **Alex Flachsbart's** Opportunity Alabama was recognized as one of the Top 10 Community Organizations in the country in Forbes's OZ 20: The Top Opportunity Zone Catalysts report.
- **Victor Luckerson** started a newsletter

featuring research for his upcoming book project on Greenwood/Black Wall Street. Read "Run It Back" and subscribe.

- **Lita Waggoner** was named an Albert Schweitzer Fellow, an award that allows Fellows to "develop and implement service projects that address the root causes of health disparities in under-resourced communities, while also fulfilling their academic responsibilities."
- **Danielle Cassady** and UA alum Paul Kolotka got engaged in December 2019. They now live in Washington, DC and plan to get married there in February 2021.



- **Jessica Kuperberg** ('09 Fellow) married Sean Strong on the shores of the Chesapeake Bay on October 5th, 2019. The wedding was officiated by **Richard Cockrum** ('10 Fellow)! (See picture)
- **Shawn McGee** accepted a position with Fidelity National Information Services (FIS) at their office in Birmingham, Alabama. He will be joining the company as scrum master in their associate development program, where he will be learning and leveraging skills relating to Agile processes and Scrum theory.

FEBRUARY

- **Alex Flachsbart** is among Reckon's list of 20 people who will shape Alabama in 2020.
- **Vance Ballard** was featured in Birmingham's About Town magazine for his work on "building a better Birmingham" by revitalizing the South Eastlake area of the city.
- **Cruise Hall** is excited to announce his marriage to Christina Nichols. The couple lives in Atlanta with their adorable dog named Maggie.
- **Jennifer Mims** opened a new Real and Rosemary with coffee by Caveat in the Summit area of Birmingham. She invites all the

Blackburn community to stop in and say hello.

- **Jordan Patterson** moved back to Alabama, joining Lightfoot, Franklin, & White as an associate in Birmingham.
- **Olivia Bensinger** is moving from NYC to Huntsville to start a job clerking for Judge Lynwood Smith.
- **Angelica Agee Prince** started a new job at the Jefferson County Public Defender's Office as a trial attorney.

MARCH

- Fellow and AB Member **Jenna Bedsole** was recognized as one of several Women of Distinction by the Girl Scouts of North-Central Alabama.
- Fellow, AB Member, and Society Member **Bradley Davidson** was working as presidential candidate Mike Bloomberg's Alabama campaign director.
- **Seth Morrow** was the campaign manager for Rep. Bradley Byrne's run for the US Senate.
- **Chisolm Allenlundy** wrote an oped for AL.com entitled "Two bills aimed at prisons would be a 'step backward'."
- **Ian Sams**, former campaign press secretary for Sen. Kamala Harris, was featured on several news outlets regarding the ongoing Democratic presidential primary including on the PBS NewsHour.
- **Akeisha Anderson** moved back to Alabama from Los Angeles to become Alabama Appleseed's new policy director.
- **Catherine Alexander-Wright** was promoted to the position of Associate Vice President of Domestic Violence and Support Services at the YWCA Central Alabama.

APRIL

- **Koushik Kasanagottu**, an internal medicine resident at Johns Hopkins Bayview is tweeting about his experiences treating patients and working with the government. He has also been used as a source in a CNN article about preventing the spread of COVID-19.
- **Dr. Jason Farley**, Professor, PhD Program Director, and Co-Director Clinical Core Hopkins Center for AIDS Research presented webinars on COVID-19 and HIV.
- **Abigail Morrow** presented on Implicit Bias during the 2020 Momentum Conference.
- **Ibukun Afon** started Birmingham's branch of a free grocery delivery service for senior citizens called "Leave It To Us."

- **Stevona ("Stevie") Elem-Rogers's** life and work was featured in the Birmingham Times Article "Stevona Rogers: Educator With The 'Earnest Ear and Courageous Pen'."
- In the Spring 2020 UA Alumni Magazine we saw lots of Fellows: "Meet the Future, 20 Young Alumni in 2020" featured the work of Fellows **Michael Moore**, **Anna Ruth Williams**, **Elliot Knight**, and **Danielle Blevins**; **Meg McCrummen Fowler** has been nominated as District 10 Vice President of the UA National Alumni Association. "Tide Tales" featured **Taylor Nichols** talking about wearing "soffee shorts and too-big T-shirts" as a student in the mid-2000s. FIN Internal Vice Chairperson **Caroline Shook** got engaged on the rooftop of her Birmingham apartment during social distancing!

MAY

- **Will Tucker** continued his investigative journalism work and recently reported on the first person to die in Alabama's prisons with COVID-19.
- **Alex Flachsbart's** Opportunity Alabama worked with the Alabama Governor's office to form ALtogether, a one-stop-shop where Alabamians can ask for help or lend a hand during the COVID-19 crisis.
- Fellow and AB Member **Jenna Bedsole's** new documentary about women's suffrage debuted at the Birmingham Bar Association's Law Day 2020.
- **John Pounders** is graduating from the UAB School of Medicine, and he matched into a neurology residency at the University of Cincinnati.
- **Anthony (A.J.) James** graduated from Case Western Reserve University with his MD on May 17. In June, he started his residency in emergency medicine at Carolinas Medical Center in Charlotte, NC.
- **Bob Boylan** adopted an adorable Border Collie puppy named Bandit who was born on Feb. 12th.
- **Mallory Flowers** is excited to announce that she'll be soon "tying the knot" with her partner Carlos Gonzales. The duo live and work in Rotterdam (The Netherlands), with plans to relocate to return to the US later this year.
- **Christine Allen** was awarded a Fulbright U.S. Student Program grant in Madrid, Spain as an English Teaching Assistant.
- **Camille Carr** was also awarded a Fulbright U.S. Student Program grant to Colombia as an

English Teaching Assistant.

- **Isabella Desheplo** was also awarded a Fulbright U.S. Student Program grant to Sofia, Bulgaria as an English Teaching Assistant.

JUNE

- **Dr. M. Elizabeth Hendrix** graduated from the prestigious Presidential Management Fellowship program in June 2019. In May 2020, she was promoted to a GS 13 position in the United States Department of the Treasury in the Bureau of the Fiscal Service. She is working in the Debt Management Services Cross-Servicing Business Solutions Division.
- AB Member **Dr. Henna Budhwani** published a #Chinavirus study exploring the spread of COVID-19 related stigma on Twitter.
- **Elliot Knight** discussed how Alabama artists were supported by the CARES Act in the AL.com article "Alabama artists are resilient but losing millions due to coronavirus."
- **Evan Ward** relocated from DC to Montgomery to clerk for Judge Andrew Brasher, who is currently sitting on the US District Court for the Middle District of AL. Later in the summer, Evan will permanently relocate to Birmingham when Judge Brasher moves to the US Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit.



- **Sasha Godfrey** (2020 Fellow and former ROTC cadet) was virtually commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Army. (See picture)
- **Dana Lewis** was named a "health hero" in this month's Oprah Magazine article "Star Tracker" for her open source diabetes solution #openAPS (a homemade artificial pancreas) and being a part of the #wearenotwaiting diabetes DIY community.
- **Koushik Kasanagottu** wrote an article for CLOSER about "The Importance of Writing for Popular Media Outlets" in the medical community.

DON SIEGAL

Blackburn Society member Don Siegal passed on November 8, 2019. Don was personally mentored by Dr. John L. Blackburn as SGA president and has been a pillar of our community from the Institute's founding. Don served well as an Advisory Board member for many years, investing directly in the lives of countless Blackburn students and Fellows.

Don forged a special connection with recent classes of the Institute, having personally interacted with each student during the annual D. Ray Pate New Student Retreat. He and his wife, Bobbie (Blackburn Society and Advisory Board member), shared oral history of their personal interactions with Dr. Blackburn and Don's role as a student leader in the University's integration.

Don's enduring contribution has been The Don and Barbara "Bobbie" Siegal Endowed Scholarship created in honor of Dr. John L. Blackburn and Dr. Robert E. Witt and in memory of Dr. James Hood and Vivian Malone-Jones. It is awarded each year to a Blackburn Student who has demonstrated an interest in and a concern for the promotion of cultural understanding while maintaining an active participation in the Blackburn Institute and showing a devotion to the Institute's purpose.

Don also served The University of Alabama community as Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Alabama B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundation, Inc., and as a member of the President's Cabinet. He co-founded the law firm Leitman, Siegal & Payne and was a distinguished attorney in Birmingham for many years.



TOM STRONG

Dr. Thomas Strong, former advisor to the Blackburn Institute passed on May 28, 2020. He was a friend of Dr. John L. Blackburn and his sons, Christopher and Britt Strong, are both Blackburn Fellows. Dr.

Strong personally mentored and invested in the lives of numerous Blackburn students. He began his career at The University of Alabama as Assistant Dean of Students and Director of Housing and later started the women's athletic program, serving as the first director of women's athletics in 1974.

In 1985, Dr. Strong was appointed as Director of Student Services and in 1998 as the Dean of Students. He was named Associate Vice President of Student Affairs in 2006. Dr. Strong also coached the water ski team at The University of Alabama for 34 years - longer than any other collegiate coach in the nation. After four decades in student affairs at the Capstone, he retired in 2007 as Dean of Students Emeritus.



JOHN LEWIS

Rep. John Lewis, U. S. Congressman and civil rights leader passed on July 17, 2020. In 2019, he served as opening speaker for the Blackburn Institute's 25th Annual Symposium, where he charged our campus community to "Get in the way, get in good trouble... necessary trouble."

Rep. Lewis was raised in rural Pike County, just on the outskirts of Troy. He first heard and met Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in Montgomery as a teenager. Unable to enroll in the segregated Troy State College, he attended American Baptist Theological Seminary and Fisk University, where he became involved with the Nashville Student Movement.

Rep. Lewis served as the chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) from 1963 to 1966 and was a speaker at the 1963 March on Washington. He was well known for his role in Bloody Sunday, part of a campaign for voting rights in Selma, where he was brutally beaten by state troopers on the Edmund Pettus Bridge. Rep. Lewis' participation in the Selma to Montgomery March led to the passing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. After serving on the Atlanta City Council, he was elected to Congress in 1986 and subsequently reelected sixteen times, serving until his death.





SAVE *the* DATE

AUGUST 3 New Student Nominations Open

AUGUST 28-29 Annual Symposium and Fall Advisory Board Meeting

SEPTEMBER 3,9,15,21 Small Group Values Discussions
Facilitating a Diversity of Opinion

OCTOBER 1,7,13,19 Small Group Values Discussions
Networking Through the Generations

OCTOBER Burt Jones Rural Community Experience

NOVEMBER 5,9,11,17 Small Group Values Discussions
Being Called to Action

NOVEMBER 16 Daniel Community Scholars Poster Presentations and Reception

NOVEMBER 16 New Student Interest Session

JANUARY 13 New Student Interest Session and New Student Nominations Close

JANUARY 14-15 Protective Life Government Experience
Montgomery, AL

FEBRUARY 4,10,16,22 Small Group Values Discussions
Instilling a Lifetime Commitment

FEBRUARY 16-18 New Student Group Interviews

FEBRUARY 25-27 New Student Individual Interviews

MARCH 1 New Student Class Announcement

MARCH 7 New and Returning Student Reception

MARCH 26-27 D. Ray Pate New Student Retreat

APRIL 12 Spring Networking Dinner and Spring Advisory Board Meeting

MAY, JUNE, & JULY Summer Networking Events

LOOKING FORWARD *giving back*

Throughout the history of the Institute, taking thoughtful and strategic action has been at the core of our work. The curriculum incorporates learning outcomes associated with facilitating students' personal development, enhancing their organizational capacity, and expanding their cultural and historical understanding of Alabama. Through immersive learning opportunities, travel experiences, and a collective civic engagement project, students hone their abilities to engage in civil discourse, collaborate as a team, demonstrate empathy toward others, and exercise ethical leadership. Upon graduation, they leave The University of Alabama as Fellows prepared to advocate for positive, systemic change and work for the betterment of our state and nation.

Whether adding to an existing endowed fund, creating a fund to support new programs, or providing general support to the Institute, donors can help shape the experience of Blackburn community members for years to come. Make your one-time or recurring contribution today at: blackburn.ua.edu/giving



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