

## At the Intersection of Art and Biological Sciences

**Courtney Wombles** ('20) graduated from the University of Tennessee's College Scholars Program in May after pursuing a program titled Biomedical Visualization and Health Literacy. This program merged her passions for art and biological sciences to investigate how illustrations can be used to communicate medical information. Combined with a minor in biological sciences, her program integrated courses in biology, chemistry, information sciences, art, and design in an effort to analyze how the arts and humanities can communicate content from the hard sciences.

"Much of my program was inspired by my undergraduate work at Preston Medical Library, where I provided consumer health information, assisted with medical literature research, and witnessed the impact that medical illustration-based materials and health literacy can have within the healthcare environment," Wombles said.

With the guidance of her academic advisors, Wombles crafted a thesis focused on medical illustrations as a tool for improving health literacy, which is defined as the ability of an individual to obtain, comprehend, and utilize information related to their health.

"I witnessed the prominence and negative effects associated with low health literacy while working at Preston Medical Library, and I was inspired to apply my academic studies to the real-world problem," Wombles said.

She designed her thesis project as a response to the gap existing in patient education materials that are suitable for promoting health literacy. Currently, much of the information used to educate patients about their health is inaccessible, written at too high of a level, and too difficult to utilize by the average consumer. The final product of her thesis provided a series of biomedical visualization-based materials for consumer health education, which were meant to serve as readable and accessible health information resources. The five-part thesis project centered on the most prominent chronic diseases in the United States: diabetes, pulmonary diseases, kidney diseases, coronary artery diseases, and cancer—more specifically, cervical cancer. Each project utilized a different artistic medium and was created with readability, accuracy, organization, and accessibility in mind.



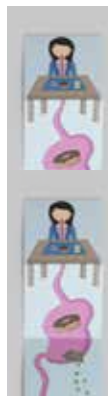
After graduation, Wombles pursued a graduate school education. She is entering her final semester in the UT's Master of Science in Information Sciences program, where she studies the scientific information pathway. As the graduate research assistant at Preston Medical Library and a practicum student at Oak Ridge National Laboratory, Wombles has continued to work with health literacy and the communication of medical information.

"My most recent project was the development and management of a graphic medicine collection for the UT Medical Center, which explores the interaction between the medium of comics and the discourse of healthcare," Wombles said.

Looking to her future, Wombles plans to continue her work at the intersections of art, design, science, literacy, education, and communication.

"Armed with two collegiate degrees and a Consumer Health Information Specialization from the National Library of Medicine, I hope to progress my research in an academic, medical, or scientific library environment," Wombles said.

**"No matter where I work or pursue higher education in the future, I always plan to integrate the work I first began as a member of the College Scholars Program."**



## FORGING AHEAD



**TODD FREEBERG**  
Director of College Scholars

Professor Jeffrey Kovac was the previous director of the College Scholars program and he has been extremely helpful to me as I took over the position last year, for which I am grateful. Kovac opened his director's message in the fall 2020 College Scholars newsletter with these two lines:

"When I was appointed director of College Scholars in the fall of 2011, my predecessor, Professor Christopher Craig, told me it was the best job at the University of Tennessee. After nine years as director, I think that was an understatement."

Despite the struggles and stresses of life during Covid-time, I start my second year as director sharing this sentiment of Professors Craig and Kovac. I feel very lucky indeed to be able to work with this incredible group of students. The achievements of many of these students over this past difficult year are the main focus of this newsletter. The College Scholars themselves are what make this program great.

One of the main ways I get to interact with College Scholars is our weekly Honors seminar, held on Wednesdays. Last fall, we held these seminars via Zoom. In spring of this year, we held some seminars face to face and some on Zoom. This fall, we are holding all our seminars face to face. With most every College Scholar enrolled in the seminar this semester, it has been a good way to catch up and reconnect with one another. (We zealously wear masks and the room in which the seminar is held is quite large, allowing decent social distancing.)

One of my main goals as director is to increase diversity and inclusion in the College Scholars program. We continue to make strides toward the former goal. We are trying to reach the latter goal in a number of ways, one of which is through peer mentoring networks that were established in fall of 2020. This was most assuredly not the optimal time frame in which to start these networks, given the pandemic and the virtual nature of our meetings, but some groups were able to meet over the course of the academic year. This fall we have set aside some time in the weekly College Scholars seminar for these peer mentoring network groups to get together and talk. Each group comprises five to seven students with a diverse array of interests, programs of study, and year at UT (sophomores to seniors).

Another of my main goals as director is to grow the program. This past spring, we had six College Scholars graduate. Since late summer of 2020, though, we gained eight new College Scholars. We have planned a number of approaches to increasing applications to College Scholars. Soriya Cooper and Emily Morgan (two of those eight new College Scholars) and I recently met via Zoom with the advisors of the different departments and units in the

College of Arts and Sciences to talk (brag?) about the College Scholars program. We are forming an outreach committee whose task will be to try to recruit new applicants. We plan to table on the pedestrian walkway of UT a few times each semester to talk with students about the program. We are also

forming a swag committee to update College Scholars Program merchandise to help spread the word about us around campus.

Over the past year we had a couple of our alumni advisory board members rotate off the board, and we thank them for their work to help strengthen the program. We have added three new members to the Board - Desta Bume, Kevin Burdette, and Amelia Parker - and brief introductions to them can be found in this newsletter. In addition to the annual board meeting held each spring (held virtually this year), we have started quarterly meetings via Zoom, to generate ideas and help make sure we are all keeping on task to build and strengthen this amazing program. One idea that came out of these meetings was to try to increase current and alumni College Scholars networking on LinkedIn. Current College Scholars are interested in building relationships with alumni, and LinkedIn seems like an ideal platform for this.

In other news, Professor Jeffrey Kovac and his wife Susan started an endowment for our program in 2019. Jeff is professor emeritus in the Department of Chemistry and Susan was an instructor in the law school and also a child advocacy attorney with the Tennessee Department of Children's Services. Their endowment will ultimately provide funding to support a visiting scholar each year, and we look forward to that first visitor! Alumni and friends may give to the endowment securely online at [giving.utk.edu/Kovac](https://giving.utk.edu/Kovac), and can support other College Scholars funds at [scholars.utk.edu/giving](https://scholars.utk.edu/giving).

Two College Scholars who graduated in 2020 were particularly helpful to me as I transitioned that summer into becoming the new director. I know that they also have been helpful to a number of current College Scholars. They are Maya Bian and Courtney Wombles, and we catch up with them briefly in this newsletter.

Although the delta variant continues to make life challenging for us all, we look forward to this academic year and to 2022. I would love to hear from you - please keep in touch via email at [scholars@utk.edu](mailto:scholars@utk.edu) or phone at [865-974-3975](tel:865-974-3975).

### Ashlyn Anderson

One of the areas most affected by the global pandemic has been the food system. With the rising cost of food and loss of employment, the exponential increase in food insecurity and extreme hunger will continue to affect our world for many years to come. As a senior College Scholar, my program is titled "Food Security and Public Health Nutrition" and examines food accessibility and utilization in the context of agriculture, health, and the environment. The way COVID-19 has perpetuated public health crises related to food is a topic I've been able to learn about in the classroom, but this summer I was able to apply my knowledge directly to the implementation of the summer meals program in St. Louis, Missouri.



After a virtual internship with the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) last summer where I worked with food and nutrition policy in the context of pandemic-response legislation, I longed for an experience to witness these policies in action. I was awarded this opportunity in June when I was accepted as a Zero Hunger Intern along with 17 other students from across the country to participate in a 10-week internship program. This internship was facilitated by the Congressional Hunger Center, a DC-based nonprofit that allows food security advocates to gain work experience at an anti-hunger organization and develop professional skills to grow as a leader.

My internship placement was in St. Louis with an organization called Operation Food Search, where I was directly responsible for program implementation of the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), a federally funded nutrition program that provides nutritious meals to children under 18 when school is not in session. We utilized a drive-thru distribution model to distribute to-go children's meals and produce boxes at six sites in the St. Louis area. I served as the on-site point person for SFSP by coordinating staff and volunteer assignments, acting as a community liaison to conduct outreach with more than 50 external partners, and managing intake of meal distribution data. In the months of June and July, we served 77,879 kids' meals, which is an exponential increase from years past given the program flexibility enacted through federal policy.

This experience was not only rewarding for my personal growth and passion for anti-hunger advocacy, but also aligned directly with my College Scholars Program. Through College Scholars, I have been given the opportunity to explore food through an intersectional lens, to examine how systems of privilege and oppression affect food access. My insights this summer were enriched because of the interdisciplinary courses I've taken at UT, and the dialogue I've had across disciplines and departments. I am grateful for College Scholars as it has challenged me to look beyond simple solutions and leverage my learning towards real-world experiences; instilling a lifelong curiosity and appreciation for education.

### Taylor Dempsey

In spring 2020, I co-founded Students for Migrant Justice, a student group focused on educating campus about the immigration system, mobilizing on and off campus, and building power with student immigrants. SMJ has hosted events on the history of immigration law, local immigration policies, and how to get involved in the greater Knoxville community. We have also partnered with off-campus organizations, such as Adelante Knoxville, Allies of Knoxville's Immigrant Neighbors, and ICE Out of East TN, to launch campaigns against local police-immigration collaboration programs. This year, we were recognized as the UT NAACP's 2021 Organization of the Year and received the Outstanding Commitment to Inclusion Award from the Center for Student Engagement.



My work with Students for Migrant Justice has greatly enriched my time in the College Scholars Program. My program is titled "Migration Studies" and is a mix of sociology, political science, anthropology, geography, philosophy, and Hispanic studies. I study immigration policy and the specific ways local police collaborate with federal immigration enforcement to harm communities. Students for Migrant Justice has taught me more about the importance of local politics, community building, and public education. As I prepare my senior project—a report on the funding behind Knox County's police-immigration collaboration—I will definitely utilize all of the lessons I learned from SMJ!

### Justin Edaual

I was selected to be a fellow in the VI4 Artist-in-Residence program, a science-art collaboration among the Vanderbilt Institute for Infection, Immunology, and Inflammation, Vanderbilt University-Basic Sciences, and ArtLab. Twenty students across the nation were selected to participate in this remote fellowship. Fellows were in charge of creating art, graphical abstracts, and other visual media that communicated the research of their respective assigned labs. As a fellow, I collaborated with the David Lab from Duke University. The lab's research investigates the human microbiome and its relationship with nutrition and disease.

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My artwork will be used for their presentations, potential scientific journal cover art, and a digital exhibition.

Being a part of this fellowship was a dream come true! I have always had passions for both science and art and this remote fellowship allowed me the opportunity to directly merge the two, as well as give me the flexibility to complete summer classes and obtain clinical experience on the side. Studying the David Lab's scientific literature while creating artwork showed me how both science and art go hand and hand. It challenged me to analyze and synthesize biological research from an interdisciplinary perspective and be able to communicate it through visual work. I'm extremely grateful for the VI4 Artist-in-Residence program and look forward to continuing my love for both science and art!



#### Elijah Hix

This spring, I was fortunate enough to be named one of the 2021 Goldwater Scholars in chemistry for my work on enzyme stereospecificity elucidation using a type-1 polyketide synthase ketoreductase. The Goldwater scholarship is the most prestigious award that an undergraduate in STEM research can earn and as such this is a huge boost to my early career! This entire process has served as a headfirst introduction into the work that goes into applying for other national fellowships such as NDSEG and the NSF-GRFP. All around I have learned so much by narrowing my research and being able to present it in an effective way and I am already getting to put these skills to the test as I am now applying for the aforementioned fellowships as well as graduate school applications.

In addition to the Goldwater, I also received an award of excellence at the 2021 UT EUREKa conference for my other research I conducted regarding mechanism elucidation of a tin centered porphyrin catalyst for electrocatalytic proton reduction. This proved to be a fantastically challenging project and helped me deepen my skills in quantum chemistry. With the tools I obtained I am now able to put them towards a fully independent project that will soon produce publishable work!

Even more recently than these awards, I was invited to give a talk at the Gulf Coast Undergraduate Research Symposium at Rice university. GCURS is one of the most prestigious undergraduate research conferences in the US. It pulls together many of the best researchers to learn from each other, see the state of research, and network and as such is a huge opportunity for me. I have presented my work at conferences in the past but nothing has come close to this and it will really help boost my career. I am excited to see what other people are doing in the world of chemistry and chemical biology and network with other undergraduate researchers.

#### Ashley Leininger

I was an intern this past summer at the Nashville Zoo at Grassmere. My job was a keeper assistant, so I essentially followed the keepers around their shifts to learn and to help. I got to do many exciting things such as training, shifting animals (moving animals from one enclosure to another), creating enrichment for animals, and giving keeper talks. One of my favorite things was getting to learn each animal's personality as well as their care routine. It was an absolutely amazing experience.



#### Thais Lloyd

Hello all! During the spring 2021 semester, I took time off from school to re-center and refocus myself, and luckily, I was able to do just that! I submitted a proposal for my first ever solo exhibit through Gallery 1010 in downtown Knoxville. It was accepted and my exhibit, Men Say Things to Me, was on display September 17-19, 2021.

The idea of the exhibit was to show people how female-presenting folks experience sexism in everyday interactions, from someone commenting on their clothing to saying that childbearing people are failing if they do not have more than two offspring. This fits perfectly into my program, titled "Women in Art with an Emphasis on the United States," because it brings together all aspects of my studies into one experience. I designed my program to help me curate, execute, and paint exhibits that focus on true representation of the female-presenting form, and this exhibit does just that.

With the help of my family, I cleared out our back shed and converted it into a painting studio so I could work on the 12 pieces included in the exhibit. Originally, I requested my exhibit to be in November so that I would have more time to execute each piece, but it was slotted for mid-September, so I have really had to learn how to appropriately budget my time and finances in order to make sure that I am going to be able to meet my deadline. Even though at the time of this writing, the exhibit is yet to happen, I have already learned so much about what goes into curating an exhibit and what it means to make a collection of works that flow together and are impactful to the viewer.



#### Diego Lourenco

I recently became a Peer Coach for UT's brand new First Year Studies Program, the UT Success Academy, which was started due to the lack of retention in our Black and Latinx male populations. According to the university's retention data, Black and Latinx males are far less likely to receive a degree, in comparison to their peers. The UT Success Academy is designed to help increase retention, from when students first get to campus, all the way through to graduation. First year students who are a part of this program must engage in activities that, according to data, a "successful student" does. For example, attending tutoring/supplemental instruction sessions, joining a student organization, meeting with academic advisors, creating an academic success plan, and more. If by their senior year of college, they remain in good standing with the program, on top of their renewable scholarship, they will earn an all-expenses-paid, study abroad experience in South Africa. The first cohort size is 215 students, and the goal for next year is 200+. We want to keep expanding the program every single year and continue to help students with their transition into college life.

The role of the Peer Coach is to mentor, advise, and help with the college transition into a primarily white institution for these incoming minority students. I have a group of eight freshmen students that I advise. A few of my responsibilities include hosting events for my mentees to attend, co-facilitating a First Year Studies class, helping the students to make sure they're meeting their goals and staying on track with the program. Since I've become a Peer Coach, I've gotten to meet and know so many different freshmen students and learn about their lives. Seeing incoming freshmen come to the university and being able to help them with their transition into college is an amazing experience for me; especially considering how difficult it is to make that transition as a minority student at UT. I wish there was a program like this when I was a freshman at the university. Overall, my goal is to have a positive impact on these students and ensure their time at UT is worth it. Already, only full two weeks into the semester, students have come to me expressing their concerns about college, their fear of failure, and their thoughts on leaving. Our goal is to make sure students are staying in college, and to make Rocky Top feel like home. That's exactly what I plan to do in my role as a Peer Coach.

#### Sherry Ludington

As a senior in the College Scholars program, I took full advantage of the internships and opportunities available to me this past summer. My efforts to become a documentary filmmaker have led me to two conclusions: first I need to be a good storyteller, second, I need to know how to do it all: filming, editing, lighting, audio, etc. I accepted an internship with UT in the communications marketing department creating videos to "tell the stories" of students while promoting the various clubs and organizations they participated in. I also had the opportunity to help host



a group of journalist students and their professors from Serbia...I am working on a documentary of their trip and will be traveling to their country in December. Additionally, I worked with the university's TVC commercial production unit along with Clinton Elmore filming plays and creating training videos. What many do not realize is the vast amount of professional video equipment acquired by the university over the past two years is astounding. As a result, I now feel confident about my skills and abilities to create content in the film industry as I arrive to the finish line of my College Scholars journey.



#### Hannah Morris

This summer I worked as a teaching fellow for Breakthrough Collaborative, a national leader in education equity that provides empowering educational experiences for traditionally underrepresented students on their path to college. It is also an AmeriCorps program. Breakthrough admits students in middle school and partners with them until they graduate from college. I specifically served as a teacher in the academic summer program. I taught an interdisciplinary course that focused on identity, diversity, justice, and action. I worked with my students to identify a community issue they were passionate about and create an action plan for seeking justice. I also was the head

of the Community Novel Committee. This role includes leading a committee that implemented a program-wide reading curriculum. We read *Punching the Air* by Yusef Salaam, who is one of the Exonerated Five.

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Serving with Breakthrough Collaborative was an incredibly valuable learning experience that aligned perfectly with my program. The goal of my program is to combine an understanding of policy with an understanding of childhood education. By teaching with Breakthrough, I was able to get hands on experience in the field of education, but I was also exposed to the nuance of educational policy in particular. I developed important teaching skills, classroom management techniques, educational advocacy, and more. My experience at Breakthrough furthered my desire to pursue educational equity.

I am also working towards educational equity in the Knoxville community. In spring 2021, I started as an intern with the high school program at Thrive Lonsdale, which serves 9th-12th grade students in the Lonsdale neighborhood. In this role, I provide academic support, mentoring, and tutoring to traditionally underrepresented students. Further, this semester, I am helping launch a college preparation program that starts in ninth grade and works with students through the college application and acceptance process.

Working at Thrive was the first place I realized that I was passionate about educational equity, and that passion has been solidified the more than I have gotten involved with the organization. It was working here that first encouraged me to pursue an interdisciplinary major through College Scholars, and in my experience at Thrive, I learned the power of both intervention and prevention in the pursuit of educational equity. Working in the Lonsdale community has also demonstrated the impact of environmental factors on education, such as access to nutritious foods or safe play spaces.

#### Emily Pope

In spring 2021, I was invited to the virtual National Council on Undergraduate Research (NCUR) conference. This honor included creating a poster, a small speech, and gathering resources to share concerning a play I wrote in summer 2020 called Callaway. The conference itself included hundreds of college students from around the nation in dozens of different fields of study, and I feel proud to have been selected to represent the UT College Scholars among this advanced cohort of students.

During this process, I was able to network with students from fields vastly different from my own, and I found that our projects often had more in common than I would have thought at first. The NCUR conference also gave me the confidence I needed to continue pursuing my production of Callaway as my senior thesis project. The questions my peers asked of me led me to reflect on obstacles in my project, and the interest they expressed showed me that my project was worth continuing.



#### Konrad Szymanowski

I am a junior in the College Scholars program, and I focus on international and cross-cultural sociolinguistics. This past April, I participated in the 25th annual EURēCA event hosted at UT, submitting a research project titled: "What's the Price of Nuclear Energy? Negotiations of the Chernobyl Disaster in German Literature

and Culture in the Late 1980s." Under the guidance of my German mentor, Professor Stefanie Ohnesorg, I submitted my project to the College of Arts and Sciences, Humanities category, creating a detailed poster and presenting my research to several faculty mentors (over Zoom, of course). My research entailed literary and cultural analysis of two German narrative texts written in the aftermath of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant disaster of 1986, in which I discussed the main themes relating to: the consequences of uncontrolled nuclear energy, government mismanagement and irresponsibility, and collective public culpability for disasters. I argued about the importance of situating the German sociopolitical context of the Cold War by focusing on German texts; why Chernobyl in particular aroused intense public debate in Germany about nuclear energy and responsibility; and the striking ability of literature and media to provoke important discussions about moral and ethical dilemmas and issues. Ultimately, I was awarded for my research and presentation, receiving an Award of Excellence in the Humanities category, as well as an OURF Gold award.

While this particular subject of research lies outside the direct scope of my academic interest, studying firsthand the power of situatedness, the influence of literature and popular media, and the specific German context of these narratives provided me with a deeper insight into how I will approach my final senior undergraduate thesis. I intend to research the sociopolitical situation of linguistic minorities in Europe, in particular Germany, and the relevance of historical literature surrounding this topic will play a fundamental role in my thesis. My experience at EURēCA has provided me with a more dedicated, focused sense of what I can accomplish through motivation and attention to detail, and I look forward to stepping into the more professional world of research in my near future!



#### Sebastian Van Horn

This summer, I took a job with the Tony Award-winning Utah Shakespeare Festival. Out of nine shows that ran throughout the season, I worked on three out of four Shakespeare productions: Pericles, Richard III, and Comedy of Errors. My job backstage was wardrobe, which can be defined as a crew meant to

carry out the vision of the costume designer. I maintained the costumes, repaired any notes, and executed quick changes – costume changes that can happen in as little as 30 seconds.

This summer was beneficial because, while I have worked on more than 10 productions within the past two years, I have not branched outside of Knoxville and the local theatrical scene. My time in Utah presented me with the challenges of stepping outside of my comfort zone (notably a solo drive across the country), working with a new theatre, and collaborating with a conglomerate of new people. I spent a lot of time alone while I relearned how to do a job that stopped during the pandemic, but I also made plenty of new friends and memories that I will cherish for the rest of my career.



#### Zoe Ward

I was awarded the Gilman Scholarship which is a national scholarship for undergraduate students to intern or study abroad. The scholarship expands access to foreign study by supporting

students who might not otherwise be able to participate due to financial constraints. Gilman scholarships are typically awarded to low-income and first-generation students often from less advantaged regions who present academic achievement and rigor.

I have not been able to study abroad with my Gilman Scholarship just yet because of travel restrictions during COVID-19, but I have deferred my program to summer 2022. I plan to travel to Geneva, Switzerland, to study global health and development policy with the School for International Training (SIT). The program provides me the opportunity to study in the world capital of public health and sustainable development organizations. With the program, I will meet with experts from international organizations including the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Committee of the Red Cross, Médecins Sans Frontières, and UNAIDS. I plan to use the connections and experiences that I gain from this program to further my research for my senior project on effective governmental policies to combat infectious disease outbreaks.

## Understanding Care in Non-traditional Settings



**Maya Bian** ('20) graduated from UT and the College Scholars Program in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Five months before then, she had been in China conducting ethnographic research for her senior project. Bian's research, generously supported by endowments to the College Scholars Program, had been concerned with the experiences of elderly residents living in the long-term care facility her grandfather lives in. How were meanings of care shaped, articulated, and practiced within such a non-traditional institutional care setting in China?

**"The influence of College Scholars on the formation of this question and the interdisciplinary design of my research was substantial,"** Bian said. "I was seeking to understand how the interaction of Chinese philosophical thought and China's socioeconomic and political context played out in the arena of care and well-being."

Her project, as personal as it had been academic, was rewarding and illuminating, and she continues to build upon her work as a College Scholar in her current master's program. Bian just started her second year as a Yenching Scholar at Peking University—which has been entirely online due to the pandemic—where she studies China studies with a research focus on eldercare and care work.

"This next year, I will be focused on writing my master's thesis, where I hope to explore the efficacy of state attempts to regulate what it means to care through the law and official discourse," Bian said. "Upon graduating from the Yenching Academy, I plan to work in a caregiving capacity to ground my academic experiences with a greater empathy for and understanding of the labor of care, which seems particularly urgent in a world indelibly impacted by a global pandemic."

Eventually, Bian would like to return to school for an MD and/or a PhD in medical anthropology.

"I pursue this path with immense gratitude for the College Scholars Program, not only because the program encouraged and supported me in pursuing the varied interests that have led me to where I am now, but also because it taught me that doing so will make me a better student, researcher, and community member."



**College Scholars**

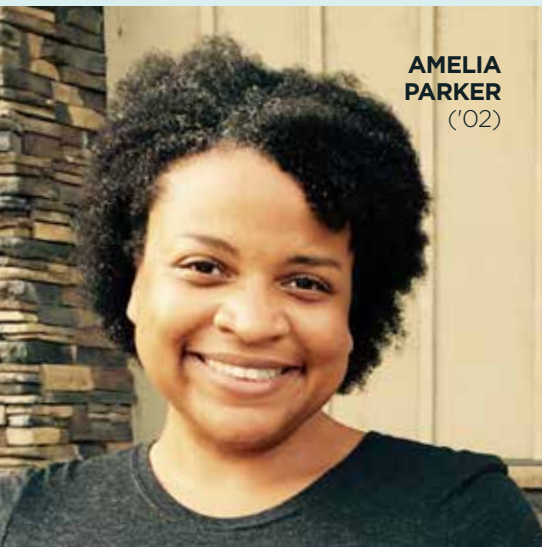
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FALL / 2021

College**SCHOLARS**  
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