



DODGE FAMILY
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA

WITHROW
LEADERSHIP
SCHOLARS

Celebrating 10 Years of Withrow Impact



INTRODUCTION

Established by the Dodge Family College of Arts and Sciences Board of Visitors in 1996, the Leadership Scholars program recognizes the brightest and most involved students in the college.

Leadership Scholars brings students together from a variety of backgrounds, academic disciplines, and experiences to expand their leadership education. The program is based on three pillars: leadership, service, and community. During bi-monthly meetings, students learn about important aspects of leadership from other leaders on campus and from each other. By learning and serving together, Leadership Scholars gain a stronger sense of their own leadership values and are better prepared to demonstrate leadership in the college and across campus.

In 2014, Cathryn and Jon Withrow endowed the Leadership Scholars program with a magnanimous gift of one million dollars. The purpose of their endowment was to fund study abroad scholarships for 20 Leadership Scholars per year. Since their contribution, over 150 Withrow Leadership Scholars have had the honor of studying abroad in France. They return from this experience to serve the college and then the world as they graduate from the university.

In honor of the service of these outstanding young people and with profound gratitude to Cathryn and Jon Withrow for their transformational endowment, the Dodge Family College of Arts and Sciences awards the 2024 Distinguished Service Award to the Withrow Leadership Scholars and the Withrows on this 10th anniversary of their gift.



ASSOCIATE DEAN REMARKS

RHONDA DEAN KYNCL



Dr. Kyncl with the 2023 study abroad students in France

In 2014 under the leadership of Dean Kelly Damphousse, Cathryn and Jon Withrow endowed the college's Leadership Scholars program. The following year, we began planning the cornerstone of the program: a study abroad opportunity. Both Karen Elmore in our college and Christophe Aurine at Université Blaise Pascal (now Université Clermont Auvergne) in Clermont-Ferrand, France helped me to craft a two-week course that would allow our students to experience three different cities and regions in that beautiful country. In May of 2016, I shared that first course with 13 young people, and my life has never been the same.

As you read the testimonials in this report, you will see the impact of that endowment and of the study abroad experience on the lives of over 150 young people since that initial foray. Each year, a new cohort of high-achieving and compassionate young people is given the opportunity of a lifetime: to meet themselves and the rest of the world as they experience the culture of France.

Their journey is essentially a spiritual pilgrimage. Outside of their daily routines that keep life predictable, they encounter themselves: their weaknesses, their strengths, their flaws, and their gifts. As they navigate a different culture and witness different habits and ways of living, they begin to examine their own cultures, habits, and ways of life. In the process, they gain a good deal of humility and a healthy dose of self-awareness. The results are inspiring.

Withrow Scholars return to OU and to the college with a spirit of community that can only grow from the challenges they have experienced together abroad. And they return with a desire to welcome others as they have been welcomed, to offer a hand like those that have helped them, and to return the Withrow investment in a way that inspires others as they have been inspired. Withrow Scholars go on to change the world and Cathryn and Jon Withrow are directly responsible for that change.

DEAN'S REMARKS

DAVID WROBEL



We use the term “transformative” with such regularity in higher education these days that I do wonder if it has lost some of its shine. Yet when I think about my nearly four decades in American higher education, from my graduate studies to my time as Dean of the Dodge Family College of Arts and Sciences, one of the programs that stands out for its truly transformative impact on students and on the College is the Withrow Leadership Scholars (WLS).

WLS began with the generous endowment made by Cathryn Withrow and her late husband Jon Withrow. This \$1M endowment gift was made to support the activities of the WLS, including the wonderful two-week trip to France for each cohort at the end of the Spring semester. That trip truly changes the lives of every student in the group, building bonds of friendship and support that will last a long, long time. The trip is one of the advantages that comes with the great honor of being a member of the distinguished WLS. However, as we all know, with honors and advantages come responsibilities.

What I love the most about WLS is the commitment shown by every member in paying back the honors and advantages that accompany their membership with a sense of heightened responsibility to help advance the learning experience and cultivate a community of belonging for others. WLS members mentor our Dodge Family Scholars helping to ensure their success at OU, and they have tutored students at underserved high schools, preparing them for the ACT and thereby providing a pathway to OU for those students, many of whom had never previously considered the state flagship university to be part of their landscape of opportunity. In short, WLS is the very quintessence of our mission as a university and the goal of our Lead On strategic plan, to CHANGE LIVES.

On behalf of the hundreds of students who have already benefitted from WLS, and the future generations of students who will benefit, the Dodge Family College of Arts and Sciences is deeply grateful to Jon and Cathryn Withrow for believing in our students and investing in their success, and for establishing a program that exemplifies altruism, empathy, and excellence, as well as global engagement.

Thank You, Cathryn and Jon for this wonderful and truly transformative gift.



LEADERSHIP IN FRANCE

STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM

The cornerstone of the Withrow Leadership Scholars is an annual study abroad program to Clermont-Ferrand, France, a sister city of Norman, Oklahoma. During their time abroad, students are enrolled in a course entitled "Leadership and Service Abroad: Virtues in Community." The premise of this course is that service learning in a geographic location outside their comfort zone is a meaningful method for enhancing student leadership.

During this 2-week course, students participate in a significant study abroad experience that will enhance their leadership ability and engagement when they return to the University of Oklahoma and Dodge Family College of Arts and Sciences communities. The study abroad excursions are augmented with readings and writing focused on the development of servant leaders who will return to the OU community and the college and invest in the development of our community.







2016

Oklahoma

FRANCE
SUMMER
2016

SUMMIT
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PROPERTY OF OKLAHOMA

REFLECTIONS FROM SCHOLARS

The next section includes experiences and reflections from scholars who participated in the Withrow Leadership Scholars annual study abroad program from 2016-2023.

2016



Alexa Beemer (right)

ALEXA BEEMER

I was a part of the inaugural trip in the summer of 2016.

My time in France had a profound impact on my young-adult life. I originally left the States in 2016, on my first international flight, thinking I would spend the next few weeks having a great little vacation. I anticipated having a good time with friends, enjoying copious amounts of delicious food, and soaking up all of the art and culture I could. After three short weeks in Clermont, I realized that I had indeed done all of those things; but perhaps most importantly I had done something even more important- I had fallen in love.

I not only developed a deep love for the country of France- from its people to its food to its urbanism- but also for myself. I feel as if I returned a different person in 2016, as compared to who I was when I departed. The trip helped grow my self-confidence immensely and helped me shed the last of my hesitancy around "putting myself out there." In fact, had I not gone on the original 2016 trip, I may not have seen in myself what others saw in me, and may have never applied to be Chair of the wonderful Withrow Leadership Scholars.

There is something quite disarming about traveling abroad on your own, to a place where no one speaks your language, and you know very few people. If you allow it, such experiences can be extremely transformative. As such, I am immensely grateful that the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Withrow afforded me this opportunity to be transformed.

I currently reside in Tulsa with my husband, Joseph, and my two dogs, Roxie and Moose. I work for the City of Owasso as the Planning Manager, within the Community Development Department. My Department oversees both current developments within the City (permits, site plans, planning and zoning, etc.) and long-range projects (comprehensive land use planning, grant writing, community engagement, etc.). I am very happy to call the Tulsa-metro home!

AUSTON STIEFER

Because of your endowment to the Leadership Scholars program, I was able to go abroad for the first time in my life the summer of 2016 to Clermont. I still fondly think back to that summer with classmates who have now become lifelong friends. I still daydream about the cafe on our way to our class building where we'd stop every morning for espresso and pastries (ordered in our terrible attempts at French). I remember the wonderful conversations we'd have over jambon-beurre sandwiches in Clermont's many parks with French students about the nature of leadership, service, and our studies. And of course, I cherish all of the spontaneously and serendipitously beautiful moments throughout our trip: taking refuge from the rain in a cathedral in Lyon as mass began after a long stroll through the city, arranging stones to spell "OU" within the Puy de Dome after a day of hiking, and seeing the original Thinker statue after stumbling upon the sculpture garden at the original Rodin museum while exploring Paris.



Auston Stiefer

The France trip with LS certainly changed my life and expanded my worldview tremendously. While an undergraduate, I then also completed a study abroad trip in Rio de Janeiro learning public health and urban planning following the Zika virus outbreak. I also took classes in French in addition to my course work in Spanish Literature after the LS trip, continuing to develop an appreciation for how language, literature, and travel bridge distances between people and culture. This is a common thread that has continued to mark my academic and professional careers, as I led an initiative for promoting health literacy surrounding coronavirus vaccinations among uninsured Spanish-speaking patients in Tulsa, OK while in medical school there. And now, without the travel restrictions of the pandemic, I am currently preparing for an 8-week trip to Kenya in my current role as a resident physician at Duke University Medical Center.

Since moving to North Carolina after completing undergraduate and medical school studies at OU, I've been training as a resident physician in Internal Medicine, with plans to pursue a career in Pulmonary and Critical Care. I've been spending time developing research and clinical interests in critically ill patients with significant social vulnerability as well as pulmonary disease due to environmental and occupational exposures.

My gratitude is boundless, even 8 years later, by your gift which has truly influenced the course of my life.



Chelsee Aguirre (middle) in France

CHELSEE AGUIRRE

I went to France in 2016, and that trip was monumental for me. Before that trip I had never been overseas before, and coming from a small hometown in Hydro, OK it was so eye-opening for me. The arts, the food, the culture! The trip allowed me to fully get out of my comfort zone, and become more open and excited about new experiences. I had never tried so many of the different cuisines I tried, and hiking the volcano was unlike anything I had ever experienced!

Chelsee Aguirre, con't

That trip was the beginning of my love of adventuring, which has only grown since then! Now, I live out in Phoenix, Arizona with my husband and our dog, Hobbes. We spend all of our free time exploring the beautiful outdoors - backpacking, climbing, hiking, kayaking, you name it! I currently work as a Campus Recruiter for Texas Instruments.

JESSE COKER

I was a member of Leadership Scholars from Fall 2014 until I graduated in Spring 2017, and I went on the inaugural trip to Clermont-Ferrand over the Summer of 2016. The trip remains one of the highlights of my undergraduate career and I will forever be grateful for the opportunity. Not only did the trip strengthen many friendships that I have maintained until today, it encouraged me to expand my horizons beyond the US for graduate school. Since I had seen firsthand the adventure and excitement of studying abroad, and I had already proven to myself that I could "handle" the experience, my summer in France directly prompted me to apply to international PhD programs, something I had never considered before. I ended up going to Oxford for my PhD in structural biology, which I finished in August 2021. Even with the brutal COVID year of 2020, my wife and I had an unbelievable time in the UK, meeting some of our most wonderful friends and having the opportunity to explore all over Europe. Since finishing my PhD, I completed a post-doc at the Cleveland Clinic Center for Therapeutics Discovery and was recently promoted to a permanent staff scientist role, where I lead drug discovery projects against prostate, kidney, colorectal, and brain cancer. I credit LS generally, and the generosity of Cathryn Withrow in particular, for much of my success since leaving OU. Thank you!



Jesse Coker (right) at graduation

2016 Withrow Leadership Scholars study abroad students





Jonathan Kim

JONATHAN KIM

I was fortunate enough to be part of the first cohort to go to France in 2016. Aside from the memories and friendships I made (which were a big deal in themselves!) perhaps the biggest impact came from my journal entries that I made on the various conversations we had about leadership and service. During the bulk of 2020, I had returned home from graduate school to quarantine with my parents and with little else to do I spent much of my time anxiously consuming social media content that made me feel quite negative about the state of the world.

At some point, while cleaning out my room, I found my old journal that I had used during the Leadership Scholars France trip. As I was reading through the various reflections on conversations I'd had with others on that trip, I noticed a recurring theme that we'd discussed on the importance of service in our local communities. Those recollections had a major impact on reshaping my perspective and motivated me to shift my focus to things on which I could have a more direct impact. It ultimately led to my decision to apply to the Minneapolis Redistricting Group, an independent body tasked with redrawing the city's electoral boundaries. Instead of feeling demotivated about reports of gerrymandering at the federal level, I could concentrate my attention on fighting it at the local level. In addition to being a rewarding experience, it also introduced me to people in city government who encouraged me to apply to other bodies and resulted in my appointment by the mayor and city council to a housing policy working group, where I had the opportunity to make use of the bachelor's in economics I had received from OU.

I no longer live in Minneapolis but my passion for serving local government has not left me. After recently completing my PhD in biostatistics, I moved to Morristown, New Jersey for a job with Novartis. Within a month of moving to Morristown I emailed the mayor and said "I'm new to town and eager to serve, where's the need?" and was appointed to the town's Environmental Commission. I don't know how long I'll stay in Morristown but no matter where I live I'll always be looking for local opportunities to serve, especially the obscure bodies that tend to be overlooked or dismissed as "boring".

PAIGE COLSTON

I went to France the summer of my sophomore year at OU with the first group of Leadership Scholars who went on the trip.

My summer abroad was truly one of the most impactful times in my life. I had always dreamed of going to Europe but it hadn't seemed possible until this opportunity came through the incredible generosity of the Withrows. I learned so much about myself, but I also grew closer to the other students in the program, and I am still great friends with many of them now. Because of my time in France, I felt confident enough to study abroad at the University of Bologna a few semesters later, and I've continued to prioritize traveling abroad in my adult life.



Paige Colston

I now live in Washington, DC and work in Government Relations for the American College of Rheumatology.



2017

2017



Alex Jackson (left)

ALEX JACKSON

I had the privilege of going to France with my cohort the summer of 2017. That was my very first study abroad experience. That trip changed my life. I discovered so much about myself. My love for walking, my adoration for a delicious pastry and a peaceful morning, the importance of slowing down to enjoy the moment no matter how big or small. Most profoundly, I discovered my passion and purpose for my career. Traveling to France and being exposed to quite literally a whole new world where no one knew me and what I thought and wanted was not

criticized, judged and overthought by people in my everyday life, including myself. The trip afforded me the time and space to think deeply about who I am and what I truly want for my life. Upon returning from our trip, I became a Social Studies Education major along with my Human Relations major. I completed my dual degrees and pursued passion for education by becoming a High School History teacher. I absolutely love education and getting to use both my degrees to educate and empower students is everything I could ask for.

Currently I work in Higher Education as an Advisor and Program Coordinator supporting students' leadership, professional and personal development while pursuing my master's degree in Instructional Leadership and Academic Curriculum. Withrow Leadership Scholars gave me confidence in every endeavor because I know new experiences have the potential to change my life.

ANKITHA GANGARAPU

I went to Clermont-Ferrand in the summer of 2017, and it remains one of my fondest memories from college! Attending the OU French Alumni Network Gala in Paris is one of my go-to fun facts, and I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to learn from some incredible individuals about their personal values and broader thoughts on virtues and flourishing.

I now work in DC as a health policy & communications associate for a health-focused PR firm, and during a recent brainstorm on corporate values and branding, I actually recalled our visit to the Michelin museum. At the time, I don't know that I fully understood or appreciated some of the lessons, but I think back on those encounters regularly and truly feel that the Withrow Leadership Scholars Program and the opportunity to travel abroad and experience a different culture enriched my life.



Ankitha Gangarapu (left)



Austin Coffey (left)

AUSTIN COFFEY

I went to France with LS the summer of 2017. That experience meant a ton to me. Several of my dearest friends today date to that trip. Dylan, Jesse, Daniel - who was taken by tragedy just after our time together in France - and I share an immutable bond. The excursions themselves are imprinted on my memory. Hearing the steward of a castle discuss his sense of debt to those who had built and maintained the monument, as well as his sense of obligation to do the same for future generations,

crystallized Burke's definition of society: "a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born."

I live in Brooklyn, New York. I'll soon either be working for Ezra Klein at the New York Times or attending graduate school at RAND for an MPhil in Policy Analysis. I spent the last 2.5 years working as a researcher for Henry Kissinger, prior to his passing.

JESSE HARE

I went to France as part of the second group in Summer 2017. Our trip to France provided me with many life lessons, but here are the big 3:

ONE: Take advantage of every opportunity. You never know when it might be your last chance, and watching life pass you by is a horrible feeling. Don't allow it! Daniel's passing really solidified my understanding of this timeless lesson, and I've never forgotten it since.

TWO: Crafting a legacy isn't confined to a single lifetime. Our contributions to society can last for generations if executed successfully. The steward of the medieval castle we visited who was adamant that the castle must remain standing long after his lifetime, along with Daniel's essay about legacy, brought these lessons home for me.

THREE: Lastly, integrity means being the same person in all circumstances. Correspondingly, if you stay true to yourself, life has a funny way of directing you to where you belong. You taught me that, Rhonda!

I'm living in Los Angeles and attending law school at UCLA. Once I graduate this May, I'll take the California Bar Exam, and then begin my legal career at a civil litigation defense firm in Downtown Los Angeles.

Being a Leadership Scholar was certainly a highlight of my tenure at OU. I took seriously being a representative of our university community then, and those feelings have only grown with time. I'm so grateful for that opportunity. LS provided me with amazing memories and some of my greatest friends to date. Thanks very much for letting me play a small role in it.



Jesse Hare



2018

2018



Ania Henderson

ANIA HENDERSON

The trip to France was hands down my favorite experience during my undergraduate time. Our trip to France was beautiful and refreshing given that it was my first time abroad on my own. We also had the best tour guide and teacher, Christophe. Some of the highlights of my trip included learning more about the culture and scenery of France with my cohort and by doing so, I made some lifelong friends, experienced the friendly doctors and cost-efficient French healthcare system after

dislocating my shoulder indoor rock climbing, and having the pleasure of meeting at an intimate dinner with my cohort. I appreciated kindness and eagerness to talk to each of us and I'm grateful we were fortunate enough to meet the person who made the entire experience possible.

After being a teaching assistant during my freshman year and continuing to tutor, I decided to become an educator. I am currently teaching in Dallas, TX, and last year I was the Teacher of the Year for new teachers. I have also committed ample time volunteering with Citizens Climate Lobby and lobbying in DC for climate change solutions over the past few years. As well as doing public speaking work for the Citizens' Climate Lobby at Dallas College and different climate advocacy events.

GAGAN MOORTHY

I went to France in Summer of 2018. Traveling always allows one to explore the world and themselves – and the France trip epitomizes both possibilities. In my time, I had the opportunity to explore rich layers of culture and history and take in a range of unique experiences – from walking across a volcano to drinking fine wine in an old cellar. All the while, I was building a greater sense of place and forging relationships that remain to this day.

I am now in Los Angeles working as a visual artist and creative director.



Gagan Moorthy



Katy Yut (right)

KATY YUT

In 2018, I had the amazing opportunity to spend 2 weeks of my summer in France with a small but mighty group of smart, kind, trailblazing leaders. We conquered challenges together, from hiking a volcano to navigating public transit in a foreign country to bumbling our way through ordering coffee in French. Those two weeks brought us closer to each other, but also brought each of us closer to ourselves—expanding our worldview and showing us just how big and varied this world is.

Now, 6 years later, I still carry those experiences and stories with me as I navigate post-college adult life in Austin, Texas. I'm currently using my degrees in economics and GIS as a data analyst at a small startup that uses drones to detect methane leaks on oil and gas facilities. When I'm not working, I like to go thrifting, sew alterations, create art, and play roller derby. Life is vibrant and joyful, challenging and tough, but I am supported by a network of lifelong friends, many of whom I met through Leadership Scholars. I wouldn't be who I am today without the generosity of the Withrows.

MUNEEB ATA

I graduated from OU in 2020 with a dual BS/BA in Biology and Letters.

Growing up as a Pakistani immigrant in a small, rural town in Alabama and then Tulsa, Oklahoma, I had a limited perspective of the world and my place in it. The chance to go to France with a brilliant and diverse cohort of peers gave me the opportunity to not only see, but live a different life. My experience as a Withrow Leadership Scholar gave me confidence in my abilities and potential while also increasing my appetite for travel and gaining global perspectives. I grew up thinking that I was a passive observer of the world, that its events merely happened to me. I now see myself as an active participant, playing a role in shaping what I wish to see. My experiences as a Withrow Leadership Scholar in Clermont-Ferrand immensely helped me form this new approach as I crafted my personal journey through college and beyond, enabling me to trust myself in new and uncomfortable situations. The trip also helped me grow an unhealthy affinity for macarons.

For the past 4 years, I have been working in philanthropy in Tulsa, Oklahoma at the George Kaiser Family Foundation where I've led projects in regional economic development initiatives such as the Gathering Place, Tulsa Remote, Campus Tulsa, and Tulsa Service Year. I also serve on the board of a local public charter school (Tulsa School of Arts and Sciences) as well as a nonprofit organization dedicated to bringing tech opportunities to students in underserved communities (Urban Coders Guild). However, I am currently entering a transition period in my life and desire to gain more perspective and further my education via business school. Though I have yet to make a decision on which school I will attend this coming fall, I have been accepted and am currently deciding between MBA programs at the Stanford Graduate School of Business, Harvard Business School, and the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth.



Muneeb Ata at the Michelin tire factory in Clermont-Ferrand, France



Pedro Paposseco (right) with Rhonda

PEDRO PAPOSSECO

I visited France in the summer of 2018. That trip was an incredible opportunity to strengthen my friendships with people in my cohort at the Withrow Leadership Scholars Program and to learn more about French cultural and social life. Visiting Paris, Lyon, and Claremont-Ferrand was humbling and transformative. I gained real-life, firsthand experience with French social life, practiced the limited French I knew then, and visited historical places I had learned about in my history classes, books, and even children's cartoons I used to watch growing up in Angola. These landmarks included the Louvre, the Puy de Dôme, and the Roman ruins in and around that region of France, such as the Gergovie plateau. Exploring these sites taught me a great deal about the diversity and richness of French history and community life.

One of the most impressive aspects of the trip was discovering the large number of underground tunnels, corridors, hiding places, and old houses. Nearly every old building we entered had underground locations connecting it to others or different parts of the city. Our guide informed us that many of those infrastructures were built during the Crusades, medieval military expeditions by European Catholics aimed at reclaiming the Holy Land from Muslims. These underground spaces also served as hiding places for people and soldiers during enemy attacks. Learning about these historical events was fascinating for me. As someone who values and studies History and Sociology, witnessing these old infrastructures and hearing their histories made me feel like I was experiencing life in historical France, making my trip uniquely valuable and authentic.

For all these experiences and great memories of my life, I would like to express my gratitude to the Withrow family for supporting the Withrow Leadership Scholars Program, especially the trip to France.

I am currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Political Science and MS in Management Information Technology at the University of Oklahoma. Additionally, I work as a Graduate Teaching Assistant for the course of American Federal Government.

SAMUEL KELTNER

I graduated from OU in 2020 and was a member of Withrow Leadership Scholars from 2017-2020

I am an Associate at Akin Gump in their Dallas office where I practice corporate law. Leadership Scholars was a foundational experience during my time at OU. I would not be where I am at in my career without the help of the Withrow Leadership Scholars. During my time in the program, I learned professional and social skills that serve me to this day in my role as an attorney and allowed me to get a full-ride scholarship to attend the SMU Dedman School of Law. The interviewers for the scholarship at SMU specifically asked about my experiences as a Withrow scholar and I believe it gave me a substantial edge over other candidates.

The France study abroad program widened my perspectives and taught me crucial skills for interacting with others in an increasingly connected world. Prior to the Withrow program, I had limited experience outside of the United States. The opportunity the France study abroad program offered to spend time in France, living in a new environment, not only made me grateful for life in America but also opened my eyes to alternative lifestyles, values, and experiences that I would not have had otherwise. The skills I learned while getting to interact with my cohort and the French people has made me a more empathetic and well-rounded attorney in my practice. We have many international clients and thanks to my experience in France I am able to connect and understand their needs better. Thanks to the France experience my world became a more vibrant place and for that I will always be grateful.



Samuel Keltner

2018 Withrow Leadership Scholars study abroad students





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CHARROTS

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2019

card

2019



Dat Truong (right) with Rhonda

DAT TRUONG

I went to France with my cohort in May 2019 - the month of my OU graduation. To this day, I still think of that trip fondly. Sometimes, it's the intangibles that shape your life more profoundly. Beyond the obvious aspects of simply traveling to an entirely new country (my first time to France, and my first time actually traveling across an entire ocean), traveling with the cohort really made the trip significantly more memorable. The latenight adventures searching for food in a city that became quiet when the sun set, the laughs we shared between moments of undeniable absurdity, the thoughtful and incredulous moments of reflection when we realized, "This sure isn't America" - these moments became more treasured when I shared them with others. I do believe that it was the years following my trip to France that imparted more clarity. Although my cohort often said in jest that "This sure isn't America" while we were in France, I think it was important to have gained that perspective. We seek knowledge wherever we go - we hope to use our experience and knowledge to better our lives and the lives of those around us. Yet if we are blind, or if we lack the insight to know what is wrong or inadequate, then we often fail ourselves. Perhaps in today's rapidly changing global landscape, this is becoming even more paramount - at that time, France provided me the perspective with how others lived, with how they conducted their lives, with how society may function under different rules and different belief systems. We saw the importance of taking the time to literally break bread over dinner, to have the luxury to live in a slower-paced environment, to find peace within simpler tasks. I think these were values that have become increasingly rare these days - that trip gave me a glimpse of what we could, and should, hopefully emulate within our own pockets of society.

Currently, I am in Kansas City, having graduated from medical school last year. I am currently a resident physician, training within the field of psychiatry, and each day, I am reminded of how we try to improve our own local microcosm of healthcare complexities. In psychiatry, I think of patients' mental wellbeing, but I try to not forget about my own well-being - I often spend my free time outdoors, going camping, cycling, and more recently, picking up gardening.

DEOYONTIAUNA YOUNG

I went to France in the summer of 2019, right before my senior year, and the experience is one that I will forever cherish. Before going to France with the Withrow Leadership Scholars, I had never ridden on a plane, and honestly had no plans to ever get on one. Although I was afraid, I wanted to push myself to conquer my fears. With the love and support of my cohort, previous cohorts, and Rhonda, I decided to take the plunge and a chance at a once in a lifetime opportunity. I can say with 100% certainty my time in France truly changed my perspective on life and helped me to realize just how much the world has to offer if you just take a chance.



Deoyontiauna Young at the Eiffel Tower

Without this scholarship group, I would not have had the opportunity to study abroad while in school. There are really no words to describe how thankful I am that I have such beautiful memories to look back on. Currently, I am working as a product manager in Oklahoma City at a payroll software company.



Jocy Garcia (second from left at bottom) in Paris with the 2019 cohort

JOCY GARCIA

I had the opportunity to study abroad with Withrow Leadership Scholars in 2019. Being a first-generation college student, this experience has made a great impact within my time at OU. The friendships I formed while abroad followed me back home. I enjoyed trying new food, quietly exploring my surroundings, and being able to live French culture instead of reading about it. I was surrounded by history and was able to create connections with the people and their culture. I am so grateful to have had this opportunity before graduating to learn and grow. And I hope future generations of students get to experience and learn from this wonderful opportunity.

I am a social worker at a mental health and substance abuse agency in the Southside of Oklahoma City. I am also currently applying to medical school to become a psychiatrist.

WIL NIGHTENGALE

I went to France in 2019 with WLS. In my life to date, it is still one of the most impactful experiences I've had. The opportunity to learn about and experience the culture of the world outside of the US was incredible. The trip gave me a much deeper appreciation of history and art as a whole. Getting to walk through the Louvre and see the Eiffel Tower light up at night are two of my most cherished memories.



Wil Nightengale (middle) in France

I am now a clinical research associate at a Clinical Research Organization (CRO) called Medpace. I am involved in the pharmaceutical development and clinical trial monitoring of the next generation of pharmaceuticals for endocrine/metabolic diseases, and other cardiovascular devices. While I appreciate my current job for the perspective it offers on pharmaceutical development, I am still working to get into medical school where I ultimately want to become a family medicine doctor.

WLS provided me a shared space of likeminded peers and mentors with incredible grit and determination. I learned how to set goals and identify productive pathways to achieving them. My most fond memories of undergrad revolve around the people I met and time I spent with WLS— and for that I will forever be thankful.



2019 Withrow Leadership Scholars study abroad students



2022

2020-2021

Due to the pandemic, our travel was suspended for 2020 and 2021; however, in 2022, we were able to take two groups to France in back-to-back programs.

2022



Abeer Shahid

ABEER SHAHID

Studying abroad in France was the perfect end to my OU journey. My cohort's trip was a hard fought one because of COVID and at the end, it felt a bit like destiny to go with the group that we did at the end of our senior year rather than sophomore year. I was able to form friendships with members who I otherwise didn't have an opportunity to connect with, members who I know will go on to inspire, lead, and create meaningful change in the world (many, if not all, who already are). Every aspect of our trip was so thoughtfully planned, from something as small as the meals to the visits to historic and iconic sites I'd only ever seen in pictures. I'm immensely grateful to WLS for an experience that taught me so much about servant leadership and community and gave me confidence in my own ability to serve my community, lessons I still carry post-graduation. Along with that, I'm thankful for the long-lasting bonds created on this trip with people who inspire and motivate me. I suspect this will always be one of my most cherished memories of OU.

I'm currently a second-year graduate student at Northwestern University, working towards a Masters degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling. I also serve as the graduate student for Northwestern University Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life. Just as I learned during my time with WLS, I hope to serve my community through advocacy for and greater access to mental healthcare upon my graduation in June 2024.

CECIL EHIRINDU

During the 2021-22 academic year, I embarked on an incredible journey to France, an opportunity that felt once in a lifetime. Raised by immigrant parents in a low-income household, vacations or leisure were concepts beyond our immediate concerns, overshadowed by the day-to-day challenge of securing our next meal. This trip to France, however, opened my eyes to the boundless possibilities that life holds.



Cecil Ehirindu (left) with Rhonda

A decade ago, the thought of visiting France would have seemed ludicrous—I might have even struggled to

Cecil Ehirindu, con't

locate it on a map. Yet, there I was, immersing myself in a new culture, learning different ways of living, and forming close bonds with peers, experiences that otherwise would have remained foreign to me.

I appreciate the privilege of having been a part of Withrow, allowing me to explore the beauty of France and proving that even someone with my background can reach destinations once deemed unreachable.

Currently, I am in graduate school, pursuing a Master of Public Health at the Yale School of Public Health, specializing in healthcare management in conjunction with the Yale School of Management and set to graduate in May 2025.



Gaurav Singh (right) at the Louvre

GAURAV SINGH

I went to France in Summer 2022. Traveling to France was truly a transformative experience that expanded my cultural horizons and taught me how to navigate the unknown. From grasping some of the basics of French to forming meaningful connections with my peers, the trip was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. It marked my first trip to Europe, which made me realize the vastness and diversity of our world. Often, we confine ourselves to familiar routines and surroundings, but being in France made me think about all lives lived beyond our habitual routines and how we all fit into our puzzle in life. This was only made possible through the generosity of the Withrows, who enabled me to immerse myself in another nation's rich culture and history. My experiences in France have helped me become more culturally aware of those I interact with, especially as I continue to apply it in the field of medicine.

I am currently a medical student at Tyler School of Medicine as part of the inaugural class. Although I am unsure about which career path I plan to pursue, I am excited to keep learning and doing my best to make the world a better place!

P.S. I had some cheese over there, and for the past 2 years I haven't stopped thinking about it.

2022 Withrow Leadership Scholars study abroad students



GRAYSON WISE

As someone who majored in French in my undergraduate studies, going to France has always been one of my ultimate dreams. For nearly as long as I can remember I have dreamed about visiting Paris and experiencing French culture. I am not sure why I chose France as my country to be obsessed with as a child, but this lifelong love and longing for France greatly influenced my life. I will never forget the first time I went to Paris. The experience was nothing short of magical, and I could not help but think how I never thought I would do something like this. Coming from a small town in Oklahoma, it often feels that places like France are only meant to be dreamt about and never a possibility to visit.



Grayson Wise

When I had the opportunity to go to France again with the Withrow Leadership Scholars, it was a life-changing moment. It sounds silly and cliché, but to not only go to France once, but multiple times was an insane notion for me to think about. I think about my trip to France with the Withrow Leadership Scholars constantly, and it remains one of my most cherished memories of undergrad. I am so thankful for the group of students I went with as they were some of the kindest, most engaging, and welcoming people I have met. Of course, I knew them somewhat beforehand, but there is nothing quite like the connection you gain with people through an experience abroad. It is a beautiful bond, and it is something you cherish forever. I believe studying abroad is one of the most influential experiences anyone can have, and I advocate for everyone to have the opportunity at least once.

Withrow gave me and so many of my peers that opportunity, and for that I am so grateful. From late nights chatting with friends on a riverbank in Lyon to hiking volcanoes in Clermont-Ferrand, the trip to France was one of the best experiences I have had in my life.



Ishan Bhanot (left) with Rhonda

ISHAN BHANOT

I went to France with the Withrow Leadership Scholars in the Summer of 2022, and it was an incredible experience. Traveling with my cohort allowed us to bond, learn more about one another, and form lifelong friendships. It's intimidating to be in a new culture but being surrounded by friends made me more curious and open. And through this opportunity, I learned so much about France; from the thrift stores of Paris to the Michelin Museum in Clermont-Ferrand, I saw and experienced a multitude. This trip was one of my defining experiences

in college. I look back on the memories, the photos, and the souvenirs with love and appreciation. Thank you for providing this for us!

During the trip, I was applying to medical school, and I'm currently an MS1 at the University of Oklahoma College of Medicine. I'm interested in ophthalmology, especially surgical subspecialties, and I hope to give back to the community by providing free vision care for the uninsured and underserved.

JAVIER MARTINEZ

I went to France in the summer of 2022. For me, this program and study experience meant the world and, truly, gave me closure that I made the right decision to further my education at OU. Being a Withrow scholar provided an opportunity to share experiences, strengthen skills, and learn from other leaders within our phenomenal college. My college journey was far from ordinary, like many others who navigated through the challenges of the pandemic. Initially, I anticipated studying abroad in my freshman year summer, but the pandemic abruptly halted those plans. It was a dream put on hold until further notice. It wasn't until my junior year, upon being accepted as a Withrow scholar, that this dream reemerged.



Javier Martinez

At that point in my life, the furthest I had ventured outside the States was across the border into my parents' home state of Chihuahua, Mexico. This trip to France encapsulated everything my college years had offered. It allowed me to explore my independence and freedom, metaphorically and literally navigating unknown terrain. I forged new relationships and solidified bonds made through the program.

As a first-generation college student from a small town in Oklahoma's panhandle, I never imagined such opportunities. Cherishing the memories made in France, I remain profoundly grateful for the endowment and its mission to empower extraordinary students like the college.

I am pursuing a master's in Clinical Mental Health Counseling at OU beginning this summer. In an effort, to gain my LPC in the state of Oklahoma.



Julie Dawkins (far right) in France

JULIE DAWKINS

I went to France in May 2022. My time in France was incredibly impactful and was in part what prompted me to spend a whole semester there in the Spring of 2023! I learned so much about cultural communication (including struggling through interacting with a very patient French worker at a FNAC entirely using Google Translate), practicing my own French, appreciating the most gorgeous art and architecture, and gaining invaluable memories with my cohort. As I approach graduation and reflect on my time at OU, my trip with Withrow to France is 100% the thing I would do again if I could – it is truly such a special experience.

I will be graduating in May 2024 with my double major in Letters and Economics as well as my MA in Economics. I also just recently won the Carl Albert award, the most prestigious honor offered by the Dodge Family College of Arts and Sciences! I will be studying policy or data science for a year in the UK attaining another master's degree. If not, I will pursue jobs and/or internships in the nonprofit/policy world and figure it out!

MARYCRUZ FLORES REYNOSO

I joined Withrow as part of the Fall 2019 cohort and my France trip was pushed until the end of my senior year due to COVID. I feel incredibly lucky that I was able to participate in leadership building through Withrow during my time at OU and was able to attend the France trip. The trip pushed me outside of my comfort zone as I was in a country where I did not speak the language. The cultural engagement and leadership opportunities from the trip were an impactful experience that I remember fondly. The experience emphasized the importance of cultural humility and the beauty of flexibility and going into experiences with an open mind. I can't think of a more perfect way to have ended my time at OU or with a better group of people!

I will graduate with a Master of Science in Library and Information Sciences from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign in May. During my time at the iSchool, I have served as a graduate assistant for the Center for Children's Books and the open-access journal Research on Diversity in Youth Literature. I was granted the Spectrum Scholarship award from the American Library Association and plan to use my MSLIS degree to start a career in public librarianship. I am interested in youth services and serving Spanish-speaking patrons.



Marycruz Flores Reynoso



Max Bouvette (far right) in Paris

MAX BOUVETTE

My name is Max Bouvette, and I traveled to France with Withrow Leadership Scholars in the summer of 2022. I will always be incredibly grateful for the abundant moments of learning and camaraderie which I found throughout our trip. It was my first time leaving the country and I couldn't have asked for a better planned experience. I still often chat with my classmates about our memories and look back on the photos. I feel as though we were able to truly experience the cultural aspects of France and obtain a valuable, broader worldview.

After graduating from OU in 2023, I have continued my education at the OU College of Medicine through pursuit of an M.D. My life is filled with a whole new set of amazing classmates, along with a lot more coffee and studying. The Withrow family and Rhonda are truly unique and have impacted many students. I hope to one day pass on the actions of generosity that I have been privileged to experience.

NOELIA MONSERRAT RODRIGUEZ

My experience with Withrow was profoundly meaningful. Each Monday, I was motivated to attend meetings, knowing that I would feel genuine comfort, support, and be challenged to be a better leader/person on campus. These feelings only grew when we traveled to France, where we engaged in conversations focused on personal growth, purpose, and global responsibility. I left France reflecting on the Michelin Brothers and their ability to persevere and reassess, even after losing everything; our visit to St. Saturnin, where Emmanuel shared, “travel with nothing, so you will be ready for anything;” walking the Puy de Dome and thinking about how quickly history can change, but life continues.



Noelia Rodriguez (middle)

I will FOREVER thank my lucky stars for Withrow and the incredible community it brought me. This summer I am headed to Boston to work at Berklee—a decision I made so I could once again be close to my forever Withrow friend, Maria Bustamante. Withrow continues to impact every aspect of my life—and I truly would not want it any other way.

Since graduating from OU with my BA in Communication Studies, minors(s) in Human Relations and Latinx Studies, I have moved to Tennessee! As a first-year graduate student in the MS College Student Personnel Program at the University of Tennessee, my commitment to social justice education greatly influences my student affairs practice and drive to inspire students to engage in social change within their circles of influence. My experience with Withrow motivated my decision to work in the Jones Center for Leadership and Service, where I work with our VOLbreaks program. VOLbreaks allows undergraduate students to engage in strong and direct service during their regularly scheduled Fall and/or Spring break, hosting national and international trips that have a variety of social issues themes to choose from (i.e., sustainability, basic needs, neurodevelopmental differences, etc.)! In addition to VOLbreaks, I also serve as a Student-Athlete Development Intern for the Thornton Athletics Student Life Center and the Access and Engagement Intern for the Office of Sorority and Fraternity Life. I have had incredible support pursuing and continuing to finish the McNair research I started at OU—this last Spring break, I presented at the 2024 American Association for Hispanics in Higher Education (AAHHE) Conference.

After graduating in May 2025, I intend to pursue a doctoral degree and eventually make my way back to Oklahoma.

2022 Withrow Leadership Scholars study abroad students





Saadia Nazir

SAADIA NAZIR

If you ask any student in Withrow Leadership Scholars what their defining “WLS moment” was they’ll likely answer the France trip. The France trip made me truly understand what Withrow stood to offer. Of course there were important meetings beforehand from resume workshops, speakers, and fun game nights, but going to France and the experiences I had there are what make this program so unique. Traveling with some of the most amazing people, taking in the culture of the country, and the many amazing meals shared filled me with a

desire for more! I came back to Norman eager to give more of myself to WLS while I was still at OU, and being chair of the organization has truly been an honor and joy. Going forward, I envision myself seeking opportunities to enrich myself and push the boundaries of what I am capable of, this time with the confidence I found in France! Instead of finding excuses to not try new things, I am more determined than ever to create an impact in whatever capacity I am able to. Withrow Leadership Scholars has shown me there is truly no small act, and you never know how much a fresh baguette and cheese in the streets of France has to offer until you try it. Thank you!

SARAMARIE AZZUN

I went to France in 2022. Visiting France for free was a dream come true, a kaleidoscope of experiences that transcended mere sightseeing. It brought me memories and friends that are now forever. As a low-income student, I typically do not have the means to see the world, an experience that I now believe is necessary for broadening my perspective, fostering cultural understanding, and nurturing personal growth.

Currently, I am a first-year medical student at the University of Oklahoma School of Community Medicine in Tulsa, Oklahoma!



Saramarie Azzun (far right) in France



2022 Withrow Leadership Scholars students at the Michelin Museum in Clermont-Ferrand



2023

2023



Abigail Lam with her Leadership Scholars graduation stole

ABIGAIL LAM

The France study abroad experience with Withrow Leadership Scholars was absolutely incredible and unforgettable! I'm so thankful to have the opportunity to be immersed in a different culture with my peers that quickly became my friends. This experience allowed me to grow in some many ways. I am so appreciative of Cathryn's generosity and support.

ALLIE SCHWARTZ

Withrow Leadership Scholars is something I never knew I needed in my life. Withrow has given me such deep and intentional connections with my peers that I carry with me on and off of campus. Having a space to be a leader and learn from others is such a privilege and blessing. Coming together for our meetings is always a highlight of my week, it's a moment of stillness where everyone is able to just exist.



Allie Schwartz

Any expectations I had about France were well exceeded due in large part to awesome funding, planning, and people. I really grew personally and in my friendships with my cohort. France opened up a ton of possibilities to explore myself and the world around me. Everyone came with different experiences and knowledge about travel and other things that came with the trip, it was so cool to experience in real time.



Corinne Bell

CORINNE BELL

I have immense gratitude for Withrow Leadership Scholars and the associated opportunities I received. As a Resident Advisor, I was worried that I would not have the time or financial means to study abroad during my time in undergrad. Thanks to WLS, I was able to pursue this goal of mine and create meaningful friendships in the process. Exploring a new country with friends, both new and old, was deeply enriching. I returned

Corinne Bell, con't

from France with a widened perspective and the confidence to seek experiences outside of my comfort zone. In my graduate school applications and interviews, I spoke highly of the community, mentorship, and camaraderie I experienced in Withrow. I will carry the memories and friendships with me into the next steps of my career. Thank you WLS!

EMILINE HENDERSON

Getting the opportunity to travel to France with the Withrow Leadership Scholars Program was beyond impactful for not only my personal growth as a leader, but also for my global perspective and worldview. It was simply amazing. What was also amazing was the chance to travel with such an outstanding group of individuals that are not only fun, intelligent, creative, kind, and wise, but that also showed me what it truly meant to be a leader and friend.



Emiline Henderson



Josiah Morgan

JOSIAH MORGAN

The opportunity I had to go to France through the Dodge Family College of Arts and Sciences Withrow Leadership Scholars was eye opening. I had never been outside the country before and enjoyed my time in France tremendously. This trip has made me realize how important travel is to widening my perspective, opening my mind to think more critically and to appreciate the world a bit more. I travel as often as I reasonably can, and will be going overseas to Europe again this summer for a choir

tour with the OU Men's Glee Club.

Withrow Leadership Scholars allows me to connect with other student leaders on campus, leading to collaboration and transfer of ideas. I am very thankful for the opportunity to be a part of this group, and I believe it truly changed my life for the better.

LUCY COLEMAN

Going to France with the Withrow Leadership Scholars was such a transformative, humbling, and awe-inspiring experience that I am so grateful for. I learned about the world around me and had many opportunities to be introspective and reflect on my values and principles. My welcoming cohort taught me how to navigate unfamiliar situations and broadened my view of our campus community through



Lucy Coleman

Lucy Coleman con't

their leadership and involvement in diverse student organizations. The joy, resilience, and passion I gained from the trip drives my continued efforts to serve campus as a mentor and a leader. In my positions, I hope to instill in others a desire to broaden their own perspectives and be advocates for what they are passionate about. Through giving back and uplifting others, I've found a sense of purpose in my leadership and an ambition to cultivate future leaders. I want to sincerely thank the Kyncls, the Aurines, my lovely cohort, and most importantly Jon and Cathryn Withrow for giving me an unforgettable experience.



Lucy Westemeyer

LUCY WESTEMEYER

Withrow Leadership Scholars has been by far my most impactful experience at the University of Oklahoma. Through Withrow, I have learned valuable leadership skills, traveled to one of the most beautiful and enriching places in the world, and most importantly met lifelong friends. Withrow uniquely positions strong leaders from very different walks of life to grow in community with each other, allowing us to build strong networks that will benefit our lives long after college. There are

many people I've been able to grow close with that I would never have met otherwise, and I am so extremely grateful to the Withrow Leadership Scholars program for bringing us together.

RYNA ZUBAIR

My name is Ryna and I had the honor of traveling to France with my Withrow cohort in the summer of 2023. This experience as well as taking the class meant so much to me in learning about French culture and its contributions to art, literature, fashion, cuisine, and philosophy. I had the opportunity to explore its iconic architecture, from medieval cathedrals such as Notre Dame de Paris to the Palace of Versailles. In addition to the food, the music, and the romantic atmosphere, studying abroad not only allowed me to learn more about another country but also to become closer with and get to know my cohort from our cherished memories together. One of my favorite moments was our cohort's hike together in Clermont-Ferrand. Being in new surroundings, away from my daily routines, allowed me to reflect on life, values, and aspirations. I thought a lot about how others who visit my home would find it beautiful and novel as well. I am truly grateful for the experience and believe that exposure to a different culture and society contributory to one's personal and professional development.

These days I am currently scribing at the Mercy Hospital emergency room here in Oklahoma City and am excited to share that I will be starting medical school this fall. I hope to apply what I've learned through studying abroad and from our travel and leadership class to my future of being a physician and interacting with a diverse group of patients.



Ryna Zubair (top right) in France



2023 Withrow Leadership Scholars students

WITHROW LEADERSHIP SCHOLARS

Thank you Cathryn and Jon!

