

L & L EOLA EDUCATIONAL  
ADVANCEMENT FOUNDATION

## NEWSLETTER



## A Year of Breaking Barriers: L&L EAF's 2025 Journey

**Scholar Award:** recipient Ali Liddell was able to make the final push to graduate from college and begin his healthcare career in the field of nursing. His journey demonstrates the life-changing impact of donor support (page 2).

**Making Waves:** STEM Cohort scholars presented research at major national conferences, showcasing undergraduate excellence and advancing scientific discovery (pages 2-3).

**Investing in Scholars:** STEM Cohort scholars Adaugo Nwachukwu and Faith Mwango gained hands-on clinical experience and mentorship at the Minority Pre-Health Symposium, strengthening their commitment to careers in medicine (pages 4-5).

**Inspiring Scholars:** ACS President Dr. Dorothy Phillips visited Rhodes College, inspiring STEM Cohort scholars and strengthening regional scientific partnerships. (page 6).

### Get Involved

**Scholar Highlights:** STEM Cohort scholars earned admission to MD, DO, PhD, DVM, JD, and MSW programs, advancing toward leadership careers in healthcare, science, and law (page 6).

**The Trailblazers Cohort:** The Trailblazers Cohort Class of 2025 achieved remarkable success, including 37 graduates, multiple publications, and strong employment and graduate school outcomes (page 7).

**Expanding Our Reach:** Foundation leaders raised national awareness of the STEM Cohort at the NOBCCChE Conference, highlighting student success and expanding new program opportunities (page 8).



## From Persistence to Profession

**This year** we were able to award one Scholar Award to Ali Liddell. Our Scholar Award provides gap funding and resource funding for students who are dedicated to their academics and persistence in pursuing a career in STEM.

For many students, the final stretch of a degree is the hardest. One of our recent scholars reached a critical crossroads when his institutional aid for college had been exhausted. Despite this financial gap, his dedication to his academics never wavered. Because of your contributions, L&L EAF was able to step in with a Scholar Award to help him complete his degree.

Ali shared: *"The Scholar Award supported me to persist in getting my undergraduate degree despite not having any more institutional aid for college."*

### A Future in Motion

Ali's persistence has paid off as he has now officially finished his college education, earning a degree in Urban Studies from Rhodes College. With the momentum provided by the award and the foundation's belief that he "belongs in the room," Ali has gone on to become pursue his career in nursing, becoming a certified CNA. He is no longer just a student with a dream; he is a professional actively contributing to the health and well-being of his community as he works toward completing nursing school for a BSN..



**Ali Liddell '24**

## Making Waves through Research

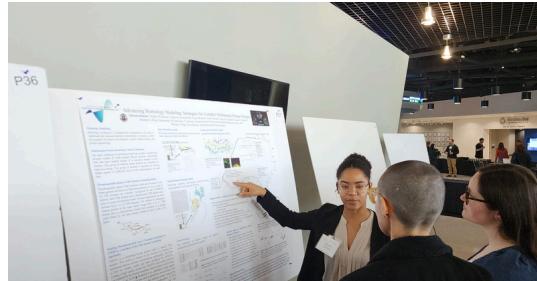
Four STEM Cohort students are gaining national recognition after presenting their research at three major professional scientific conferences across the United States, highlighting the growing impact of undergraduate research and mentorship in advancing the next generation of scientists.

Tatyana Denton '25, Joseph Shah '25, Katherine Crutchfield '26, and Ethan Cheng '27 showcased original research conducted in the Molecular Immunotherapeutics Research (MIR) laboratory, demonstrating their excellence in undergraduate scholarship. These students had the opportunity to participate in high-level scientific discourse.

All four students received support and funding from the L&L EAF for conference participation, including abstract submission, travel, and registration support. Their achievements underscore the transformative power of undergraduate research and mentorship in preparing future leaders in science, medicine, and innovation.

### Denton Presented at Theoretical Chemistry Conference

**Conference:** Denton, a STEM Cohort Scholar and a POSSE Scholar, presented her research in May at the 53rd Southeastern Theoretical Chemistry Association conference. She was among a select group of undergraduate students chosen to present alongside PhD candidates and postdoctoral researchers underscoring the quality of her work.



**Tatyanna Denton presents her research**

**In July, Joseph Shah '25 presented his research** at the Southeast/Southwest Regional Conference of National Organization for the Professional Advancement of Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers (NOBCChE), delivering an oral presentation that generated strong interest and engagement from fellow scientists and attendees.

Joseph Shah, who has conducted biochemistry research since his sophomore year, emphasized the transformative role of research in his academic and professional development.

"Research has been the thread that has connected my knowledge learned in the lab and the classroom to real issues," Shah said. "My research involves the SARS-COVID-2 respiratory virus and other respiratory viruses, using computational programming to isolate and manipulate protein interactions in order to see how we can develop medicines and procedures to save lives."

He added that the experience strengthened essential skills including patience, collaboration, and attention to detail: qualities critical to careers in healthcare and scientific research.

**September 2025, Katherine Crutchfield '26 and Ethan Cheng '27 presented** their individual research projects in September at the 52nd national NOBCChE conference in Atlanta, Georgia, joining students and professionals from across the country. Crutchfield's research experience included summer work funded through a National Science Foundation Center for Sustainable Nanotechnology.

"The MIR lab has been a favorite part of my experience," Crutchfield said. "It has introduced me to countless people and built my confidence in both myself and my scientific abilities. I had immense amounts of fun exploring how unique ideas can impact chemistry and medicine."



**STEM Cohort Scholars Joseph Shah (left), Joshua Shah (right) in MIR Research lab**



**STEM Cohort Scholars Katherine Crutchfield (white and blue shirt) and Ethan Cheng (blue shirt) present their research (top left and right photo's respectively) and meet the 2026 ACS President Dr. Rigoberto Hernandez (first from left in bottom left photo) and 2025 ACS President Dr. Dorothy Phillips (second from right in bottom left photo)**

Cheng highlighted the value of professional networking at the conference, including opportunities to connect with national scientific leaders.

"I thought it was amazing to meet the 2025 American Chemical Society president Dr. Dorothy Phillips and president-elect Dr. Rigoberto Hernandez as an undergraduate," Cheng said. "These conferences are great opportunities to connect with the larger scientific community."

## Investing in the Future



**Adaugo Nwachuku '26 (left) and Faith Mwango '27 (right)**

Adaugo Nwachuku '26 and Faith Mwango '27 attended the 2025 Minority Pre-Health Symposium at the University of Louisville, an experience both students described as transformative and deeply motivating as they pursue careers in healthcare.

Held Feb. 8 at the University of Louisville School of Medicine in Louisville, Kentucky, the symposium brought together aspiring healthcare professionals, current medical students, and practicing clinicians for hands-on learning, mentorship, and candid discussions about the realities of medical careers. **Hands-On Learning and Real Conversations**

Participants engaged in specialized tracks including Pre-Medicine, Pre-Nursing, Pre-Dental, and Public Health. Nwachuku described the experience as empowering.

Both Nwachuku and Mwango were inspired at Minority Pre-Health Symposium in Louisville

I had the pleasure of attending the University of Louisville School of Medicine's 12th Annual Pre-Health Symposium," Nwachuku said. "In just four hours, I walked away feeling more motivated than ever to pursue medicine and more confident in my ability to do so."

During the Pre-Medicine workshop, students practiced simulating patient interactions and measuring vital signs such as respiratory rate, heart rate, and blood pressure. The hands-on training offered a glimpse into the clinical skills required of future healthcare professionals.

Equally impactful were the healthcare student panels, where current medical students shared their personal journeys.

"Many didn't ace the MCAT on their first attempt, some transitioned from entirely different careers, and others faced challenges securing clinical experience," Nwachuku said. "Their stories reinforced that there is no single path to medical school—only the one that works best for you."

For Mwango, the symposium represented more than a learning opportunity—it was a defining moment.

"The moment I stepped into the halls of the University of Louisville School of Medicine, I knew it was not only going to be a pre-health symposium, but also a very defining moment of my life," Mwango said. "Their words were full of purpose and passion to serve humanity."

She emphasized the inspiration she gained from hearing about the resilience of medical students who overcame doubt, academic pressure, and personal challenges.

"My great takeaway from this was, 'Yes, it will be a rough road, but there is light at the end of the tunnel,'" Mwango said.



### BET ON YOURSELF: THE 5 P'S PROPER PREPARATION PREVENTS POOR PERFORMANCE

This year's symposium offers an exciting, interactive format designed to give you a closer look at the healthcare field. Don't miss this opportunity to connect with peers, current students, and healthcare professionals!

Attendees will have the chance to:

- Engage directly with representatives from the UofL School of Dentistry, Medicine, Nursing, and Public Health & Information Sciences

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"My great takeaway from this was, 'Yes, it will be a rough road, but there is light at the end of the tunnel,'" Mwango said.

Mwango also noted the welcoming environment and meaningful interactions throughout the day. "It was as if they were sending a message: 'Faith, you belong in the room,'" she said. "Every single conversation was a lesson, and an opportunity to learn something new and deeper."

### **Mentorship and Personal Growth**

Both students highlighted the importance of one-on-one mentorship and reflection. A message from a physician speaker encouraged attendees to focus on self-awareness and personal growth.

"This resonated deeply," Nwachuku said. "I realized that I had been measuring success by comparison when, really, the best thing I can do is focus on my own growth—learning about myself, developing new skills, and working toward my own goals."

"This symposium was not only an event, but a wake-up call to keep dreaming and putting the work in," Mwango said. "One day, maybe one day, I will wear that white coat. Heal hearts. Bring hope to the broken hearted and uplift humanity in their darkest time."

The STEM Cohort has participated in the symposium since 2020, with scholars consistently describing the experience as motivating and transformative.

For both Nwachuku and Mwango, the symposium reinforced their commitment to medicine and strengthened their belief in what is possible. "It's an experience I will never forget," Nwachuku said.



### **Continuing a Legacy of Inspiration**

## **Kennedi Fitts '21**

While attending the symposium, Nwachuku and Mwango also met Kennedi Fitts, a third-year medical student and member of the inaugural STEM Cohort class. Fitts previously attended the same symposium as a student in 2020, an experience that helped inspire her to apply to medical school at the University of Louisville.

"The STEM Cohort was that constant validation that I could in fact, be a woman in STEM and that there was always a place for me in the room with hard work and dedication"



**The foundation hosted ACS President Dr. Dorothy Phillips** at Rhodes College, providing STEM Cohort scholars with direct access to a nationally recognized scientific leader. Her seminar on Leadership in STEM inspired students and reinforced the importance of perseverance and representation.

Students had the opportunity to meet with Dr. Phillips, learn from her experiences, and connect with scientific leaders. The visit strengthened partnerships and created valuable networking opportunities.

This event reflects the foundation's commitment to connecting students with leaders who inspire and guide their professional development. Dr. Phillips' visit left a lasting impact on scholars preparing to pursue careers in science.



**Dr. Dorothy Phillips**  
**2025 President of the**  
**American Chemical Society**



### **Snap Shot of Student Successes in 2025!**

The L & Leola Educational Advancement Foundation proudly celebrates the outstanding graduate and professional school acceptances achieved by STEM Cohort scholars, marking a significant milestone in their academic and professional journeys. These acceptances reflect years of dedication, academic preparation, and commitment to careers that will advance healthcare, science, law, and social impact.

Scholars earned admission to a wide range of highly competitive programs, including Doctor of Medicine (MD), Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (DO), Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM), Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), Master of Social Work (MSW), Master of Public Health (MPH), and Juris Doctor (JD) programs.

Among those accepted are Alex Williams '21 and Erica Mosby '23 to DO programs, Sahithi Kundajavalla '23 and Aaron Cooper '24 to MD programs. Kaylah Whalum '21 was accepted into a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine program, Grace Lovett '21 earned admission to a PhD in Biology program. Nakayla Yancey '24 was accepted into a Master of Social Work program, Deenat Yusuf '25 was accepted into a Master of Public Health program, and Kellen Whalum was accepted into law school.

These admissions represent both the individual achievement they reflect the collective impact of mentorship, professional development, and community support provided through the STEM Cohort and the foundation's initiatives. As these scholars move forward into advanced professional training, they are preparing to become physicians, scientists, veterinarians, legal advocates, and social impact leaders. Their success demonstrates the transformative power of investing in talented students and supporting them as they pursue careers that will strengthen communities and advance society.



### 2025 Senior Retreat and Celebration at Main Event

"I have always been thankful for the cohort program because I knew it would provide me with the support and resources I needed to be successful"

-Julian McMillian '25

The STEM COhort program gave me a sense of belonging and confidence at critical moments in my academic journey. The mentorship and encouragment I received helped me push through challenges and believe in my abilities"

-Deenat Yusuf '25

**The Trailblazers Cohort (2025)** are a group of students destined to chart many new paths! The new places and endeavors you'll undertake will create the dynamic pathways for others as they follow behind in your footsteps. **Trailblazers we celebrate you!**

### Trailblazers Cohort Class of 2025 Celebrates Strong Graduation and Career Outcomes

The Trailblazers Cohort Class of 2025 has achieved an impressive set of outcomes, reflecting the power of persistence, academic excellence, and preparation for leadership in STEM, healthcare, and professional fields. With 38 graduates completing their undergraduate degrees, the cohort represents a diverse group of emerging professionals equipped to make meaningful contributions across multiple sectors.

### Academic Achievement Across Leading Institutions

Members of the Class of 2025 earned degrees from several dynamic institutions, including *Rhodes College*, *Xavier University of Louisiana*, *Prairie View A&M University*, and the *University of Memphis*. Their academic engagement extended beyond the classroom, resulting in **three scholarly publications** and an impressive total of **55 academic and professional awards earned** during their college careers.

These accomplishments highlight the cohort's commitment to scholarship, research, and professional development, positioning graduates for continued success in graduate education and the workforce.

### Strong Early Career and Employment Outcomes

Within their first year after graduation, Trailblazer cohort members have secured positions at respected organizations including St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, Piedmont Hospital in Atlanta, Church Health, and the Bioenergy Development Group. Their roles span research, healthcare delivery, laboratory science, community health, and clinical support, including positions such as researcher, medical assistant, laboratory technician, community health fellow, and clinical scholar.

## Expanding Our Reach!

The L & Leola Educational Advancement Foundation and STEM Cohort expanded their national presence through participation in the 52nd Annual National NOBCChE Conference in Atlanta, Georgia. During the conference, foundation leadership and STEM Cohort representatives participated in the NOBCChE Expo Fair, raising awareness about the STEM Cohort's impact and introducing the foundation's new post-baccalaureate program in computational biochemistry and STEM innovation.

Board member Dr. Garry Brown Jr., Esq., and STEM Cohort Director Dr. Shana Stoddard represented the foundation at the event, engaging with students, educators, and scientific professionals from across the country. Their participation helped highlight the program's mission to support scholars through research opportunities, mentorship, and career preparation.

The expo provided an important platform to share the success of STEM Cohort scholars and to connect with potential partners and future participants. Impact cards, made possible through donor support, showcased student achievements and demonstrated the measurable outcomes of the program.

The conference also created opportunities to build relationships with scientific leaders, expand professional networks, and increase visibility for the foundation's innovative programs. These efforts continue to strengthen pathways for students to pursue careers in science, healthcare, and research.

Through national engagement and outreach, the foundation is ensuring that more students have access to opportunities that empower them to succeed and lead in STEM fields.

### With Gratitude to our Donors and Supporters!!!

We extend our deepest gratitude to our donors and supporters. None of these achievements would be possible without the generosity, belief, and continued partnership of our donors and supporters. Because of you, scholars have been able to complete their degrees, present research on national stages, attend life-changing professional development experiences, and gain admission to graduate and professional programs that will shape the future of healthcare, science, and society.

Your support removes barriers, opens doors, and empowers students to pursue careers in healthcare, science, and leadership. These achievements are a direct result of your investment in their futures.

We invite you to keep supporting our mission so we can continue expanding opportunities and helping the next generation of STEM leaders succeed.



**Dr. Garry Brown Esq at the NOBCChE Expo**

### Donate at

<https://www.landleaf.org/get-involved>

You can also send a check or money order to

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