

Spotlight on Scholars Excelling in Health and Science

Whitney M. Young Leadership Initiative Empowers Scholars

The Whitney M. Young Leadership Initiative was created to provide unparalleled academic support, guidance, and mentoring to scholars from middle school through college. This continuum empowers scholars to think bigger about their educational journeys and future careers. Our mission is to provide our scholars with opportunities for success in the classroom and beyond.

Whitney M. Young Scholars face many challenges. The majority are the first in their families to attend college. To help them reach their highest potential, our wrap-around approach informs and supports scholars and their families at every step of their journey. Breaking through the limits of adversity to secure a bright and productive future is the dream of every Whitney M. Young Scholar.

In that spirit, this edition of the LINC newsletter focuses on scholars engaged in the fields of Health and Science. Each featured scholar is reaching far beyond what seemed possible just a few years ago. We celebrate their accomplishments and look forward to how their work will forever improve lives and communities.



Photo courtesy of Caleb Perry, Community Foundation of Louisville

Yaara Aleissa, WYSP Class of 2022

Yaara Aleissa is completing her third year at the University of Louisville where she is majoring in Neuroscience and Biology. She conducts lung cancer research at the UofL School of Medicine each week. Yaara is interested in studying the ways natural foods can help mitigate the negative effects of the disease. In addition to her science courses, Yaara serves as the executive editor-in-chief for the Cardinal

“Lincoln Foundation supported me and continues to support me even now through the College Transition Enrichment Program.”

— Yaara Aleissa

Edge, a student-run journal that showcases scientific research conducted by undergraduate students.

When not in class or working, Yaara finds time to study for the MCAT (Medical College Admissions Test). She plans to start medical school this fall, aiming to balance clinical practice with research.



Ayodeji Agbola, WYSP Class of 2022

Ayodeji Agbola, known as Deji, is a third-year student at the University of Louisville pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Public Health degree with a minor in Biology. His interest in public health grew from observing family members during the COVID-19 pandemic. This inspired him to focus on health disparities and prevention. He believes that many health issues stem from environmental factors rather than genetics.

Deji has gained valuable experience in healthcare by working at local hospitals

(Continued on page 2)

Scholars *(Continued from page 1)*

and is currently seeking internship opportunities to further enhance his education. Deji received the University of Louisville's Dale T. Adams Award for his contributions to the university community. This summer, he will focus on studying for the MCAT. He plans to take the exam next spring. After graduation in May 2026, Deji plans to take a gap year before entering medical school in the fall of 2027.



Mariel Liggin, WYSP Class of 2017

Mariel Liggin attended Tennessee State University earning a B.S. in Biology and a minor in Chemistry. After graduation, she enrolled at Johns Hopkins University, where in 2022, she earned an M.S. in Bio-

technology. Early work opportunities exposed her to both the research and business aspects of technology. She gained experience in tech transfer, taking new technology from the lab to the marketplace. She moved to California for an opportunity in venture capital but she soon realized her passion lay elsewhere. She found her niche as a Technology Commercialization Officer at Louisiana State University. Working for

“Enjoy the things you are learning. I truly enjoy learning about the aspects of public health, so it’s not a struggle to study. I want to learn more.”

— *Deji Agbola*

the school of engineering, she helps manage university and industry partnerships and collaborations. In her role, Mariel works with faculty and students to bring their ideas to market by guiding them through funding applications and connecting them with industry partners and angel investors.

While she finds her work gratifying, Mariel still aspires to one day attend medical school and specialize in oncology and cancer research.



Timothy Richardson, WYSP Class of 2019

Timothy Richardson graduated from Tiffin University in Ohio in May 2024 with a B.S. in Exercise Science. He entered graduate school in the fall of 2024 to pursue an MBA at his alma mater. Timothy, who attended Tiffin on a tennis scholarship, is still involved with the sport. He currently works as a graduate assistant coach for the men's tennis team. While he misses the competition, he enjoys coaching and helping younger players find ways to improve their game. When he completes his MBA, Timothy plans to pursue a Doctorate in Physical Therapy. His goal is to combine his training with his spirit of entrepreneurship by opening his own physical therapy practice.

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Q & A With Our Scholars!

What had the most impact on your success?

Timothy: My parents and coach were crucial, especially during COVID-19. The Whitney M. Young Scholars Program also helped thanks to the college trips, ACT preparation, and materials provided. They paid dividends in helping me get where I am now, and I am very grateful.

Deji: Lincoln Foundation and the Whitney M. Young Scholars Program were instrumental and monumental to my success. Lincoln Foundation greatly improved my public speaking and soft skills, alongside academic preparation. They preached about developing your elevator speech and how to advocate for yourself. 'I can, I must, I will be somebody' from the Scholar Oath is the ultimate example of what this is about.

What advice would you give to a Whitney M. Young Scholar who wants to pursue a STEM-related field?

Timothy: I'd tell them to study, study, study! Start early – both in studying and seeking internships. Don't wait until the last minute to find opportunities.

Mariel: Honestly, dream big, and don't let anything limit you. Coming from Louisville, KY, you can make an impact on your street, block, city, state, and country. It's totally possible.

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— *Timothy Richardson*

"Coming from Louisville, KY, you can make an impact on your street, block, city, state, and country."

— *Mariel Liggin*

What would you tell an 8th grader about becoming a Whitney M. Young Scholar?

Deji: Just do it!

Mariel: The relationships and the friends you make will last forever. Whatever you want to do starts at Lincoln Foundation to get to where you want to be in life.

Yaara: I'd tell them to think long-term. The program provides lifelong support through every stage of their academic journey. It is a lifelong support system.

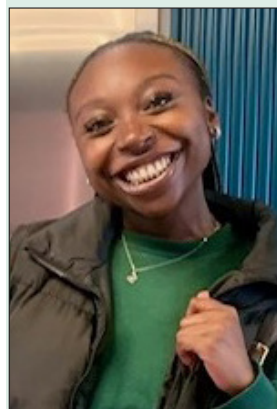
Highlights of Other WYSP Scholars in Health and Science



**Jasmine Bradley,
WYSP Class of 2023**

Jasmine is a sophomore at Northern Kentucky University, pursuing a degree in nursing. She currently works as a Critical Care Technician in the emergency room at St. Elizabeth Hospital. Jasmine wants to become a Traveling Nurse or ER Nurse. She plans to apply for NKU's

Study Abroad Program, which will give her an opportunity to study in Tanzania, Africa.



**Chinyere E. "Chichi"
Okeke,
WYSP Class of 2022**

Chichi is a Health Sciences Major with a Pre-Med focus at the University of Cincinnati. As she completes her junior year, she is preparing to take the MCAT exam this spring. She eventually plans to attend UofL's School of Medicine.



**Adriana Mulet-Miranda,
WYSP Class of 2021**

Adriana is a senior at Bellarmine University. She is double majoring in Neuroscience and Biology with a minor in French. Earlier this month, Adriana passed her MCAT exam. She plans to attend medical school with the goal of becoming a movement disorder neurologist.

Our Mission

To provide educational enrichment programs that develop and support youth in overcoming social and economic barriers to achievement



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Congratulations!

We congratulate Erica McPheeters, who was selected to serve as one of the five members of the 2025 Kentucky Derby Festival Court. Erica is a Whitney M. Young Scholar who graduated from Central High School in 2021. She was selected as a Derby Princess after a rigorous selection process that included over 100 applicants. She and the other members of this year's court will represent the Kentucky Derby Festival at many events during Derby season. Erica is currently a senior at Kentucky State University. She is a Vogt Scholar and a John Henry Scholar majoring in Political Science. Erica is the current Miss Kentucky State University and is very active in the community. She serves as a volunteer mentor for Franklin County Schools, and has interned at the Fayette County Prosecutor's Office. She also interned at Princeton University's Archive, Research and Collaborative History Program.

Erica is the latest scholar selected to serve as a Derby Princess. Past WYSP princesses include Daphne Woolridge (Derby Festival 2017), Eriauna Stratton (Derby Festival 2014), and Dominique Luster (Derby Festival 2013).



Derby Festival Princess Erica McPheeters
 Photo courtesy of Marvin Young Photography

Whitney M. Young Scholars Program (WYSP)



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