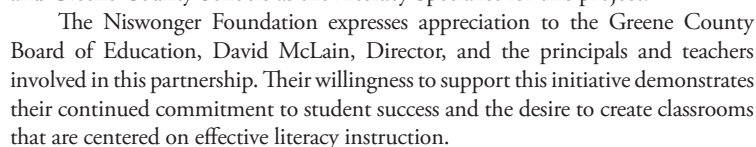


Literacy is achieved when a person has the ability to read, write, compute, and use technology at a level that enables him/her to reach their full potential. The K-2 Literacy Initiative has set four main L.I.F.E. (Literacy Initiative Focused on Effectiveness) Goals to accomplish this task. The Niswonger Foundation and Greene County schools have agreed to support each other throughout this process by accepting certain responsibilities; all centered on assisting the teacher, student learning, and sharing information to learn what works and what does not.



The Tennessee Department of Education recently released: “Setting the Foundation: A Report of Elementary Grades Reading in Tennessee.” The report contains a number of disturbing findings. Among these, by measure of the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP), only 43 percent of Tennessee third graders and 45 percent of fourth graders perform on grade level in English language arts (ELA). This is, unfortunately, good news compared to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), known as the Nation’s Report Card. This report states that in 2015, only 33 percent of Tennessee students demonstrated proficiency in reading at the fourth grade level. In laymen’s terms, more than half of the students in Tennessee’s schools cannot comprehend what they are reading by the end of

Information in this report provides particularly concerning statistics regarding children who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. The first staggering fact is that 58 percent of Tennessee's children are economically disadvantaged. Of this group, only one-third will reach proficiency in reading by the end of third grade. For students with disabilities, only one in five will achieve proficiency in reading in this same timeframe. More shocking is the fact that this is true even though the majority of Tennessee's students with disabilities do not

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## Niswonger Online

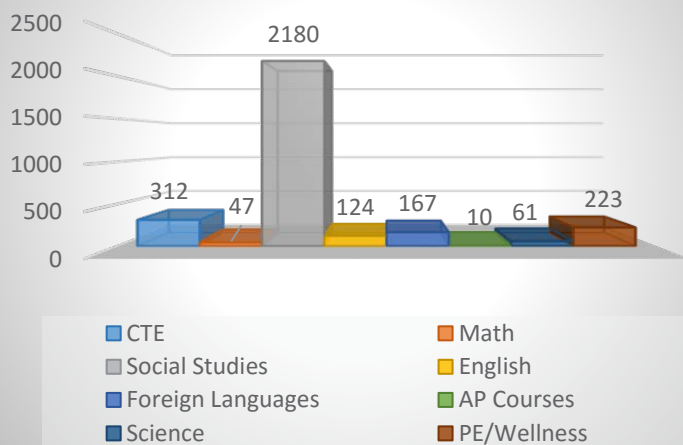
by *Gina Pavlovich, Coordinator of Learning Resources*

The basis of the Niswonger Foundation's work is to empower area schools by giving them outside options and resources to meet all student needs. The Niswonger Foundation's Online Learning Program has turned into a powerful tool for consortium schools, giving them the ability to offer a rigorous array of courses to benefit students in many ways. These courses help students by offering access to classes that may not be available at their school, gives students the ability to make up courses missed or incomplete, and helps students get ahead so they can focus on what interest them most while in the classroom.

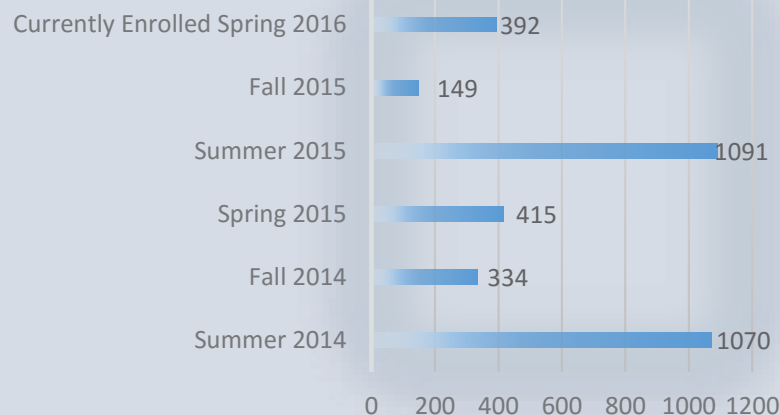
The online program experienced tremendous growth throughout the five-year i3 grant period. Through the Foundation's hard work and devotion to learning, a sustainability plan was developed that will allow students within the consortium to continue to benefit from the online courses offered. This sustainability program began in fall of 2015 and thanks to the continued support of our consortium schools and demand from local students, we are pleased to report that the online program has shown to be more than sustained, it is thriving!

In just the last five semesters, more than 3,000 credits have been awarded to area students. The Niswonger Foundation online program now offers forty courses that include three different language paths, ten Social Studies courses, various Career and Technical offerings, Math, Science, Fine Arts, and seven A.P.

### Credits Earned by Discipline



### CONSORTIUM WIDE CREDITS EARNED



classes. The Foundation is proud to offer all courses under the direction of highly trained instructors, certified by the state of Tennessee. Many of whom have been teaching with the Foundation for years. Their expertise in online instruction has helped us create an environment that educates our students with engaging material, always promoting interaction, participation, and learning.

As we look to the future, our goal is focused on growth in our online offerings and possibly opening up participation to other schools throughout the state of Tennessee. However, our highest priority is, and will always be, fulfilling the educational needs of our students here in Northeast Tennessee.



Gina Pavlovich is a native of Kingsport and graduate of East Tennessee State University where she earned her Bachelor of Business Administration and Master of Arts in Teaching. Before joining the Niswonger Foundation, Gina worked as a Social Studies teacher and coach for Greeneville High School. She began her work with the Niswonger Foundation in 2011 as an online course facilitator. In fall of 2014 she accepted the position of Assistant Coordinator of Learning Resources at the Niswonger Foundation and now serves as the Coordinator of Learning Resources. Gina and her husband Marcos currently reside in Johnson City with their three children.

### Literacy (from cover)

have cognitive impairments.

The information that should keep us all awake at night is that if a student is not proficient in reading at the end of the third grade, he or she is unlikely to make substantial progress towards that goal in the foreseeable future. The problem does not end there. Tennessee statistics show that many students earning proficient or advanced at the end of third grade will likely see a decline in this rating by fifth grade.

The report indicates that only eight percent of students who are performing below grade level when they reach eighth grade will be able to meet the college-readiness benchmark on the ACT reading examination. Another point on which we can agree is that a high school diploma no longer equates to "workforce ready." In fact, the report states that, in 2012, the first-year average salary for a student entering the workforce directly from high school was \$9,161.00, falling well below the federal poverty line. Finding that successful path to literacy is critical not only to the lives of children, but to the growth and development of communities and the economy.

If these data have you scratching your head in disbelief or wondering where to place blame, you are not alone. I believe we can agree on one point. There are no

"silver bullets." Many factors, including societal, social, emotional, environmental and educational have an important role to play in finding a successful path to early literacy.

At the Niswonger Foundation, we are willing to do our part. In the cover story, you will read about the establishment of our latest school partnership. Joining with Greene County Schools, we are beginning a project to develop a comprehensive, creative, sustainable, and technology-focused model for kindergarten through second grade literacy instruction. Built as a research design, this effort will be data-driven and specifically focused on the needs of rural schools with a high percentage of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Professional development for educators will play a key role in this work. Importantly, the project will engage families and communities in being part of the solution.

Speaking of being part of the solution, there is plenty for all of us to do. Consider the role you can play. Or, better yet, join us!

Scott M. Niswonger  
Chairman and Founder

# Upcoming Niswonger Foundation Professional Development

## *Focus on Effective School Leadership and Exemplary Instruction*

### New and Aspiring School Leader Training

The Directors of Schools in the Niswonger Consortium gathered for an introduction to a school leadership training module presented by Phil Carr and Laura Baker, trainers for the New Teacher Center (NTC). The 17 school system directors nominated 60 participants who consisted of new principals, aspiring leaders, and future leadership training facilitators. NTC leadership training topics included: culture and climate, time management and delegation, using data, professional learning communities, recruitment, staffing and working with new teachers, decision making, supervision, formative assessment, evaluation, summative assessment, visioning, and leadership style.

This region-wide training is taking place February- June, 2016. The NTC Presenter Academy (training for regional facilitators) will be held on June 27-28. Once the content and presenter training is complete, the Niswonger Consortium presenters will host the leadership training throughout the consortium to build stronger leadership skills for new principals and to grow the leadership capacity in Northeast Tennessee.

### Leadership for Blended Learning

Schools in Northeast Tennessee are being encouraged to transition to a blended learning environment in the classroom. The innovative classrooms of today includes instruction that presents a personalized learning approach. Many schools are using technology to implement this instruction, meeting the needs of each child where they are in the learning process and addressing their individual needs. With the teacher's facilitation, direction, and instruction each child can achieve. The Friday Institute, at North Carolina State University, provides leadership training for transitioning to a blended learning classroom environment.

Twelve educators were nominated by Directors of Schools in the Niswonger Consortium to attend this training. Praising the effectiveness of the training, Niswonger Foundation professional development coordinator, Vivian Franklin, commented that she took the "Dream Team" to prepare for the work ahead. Now fully trained, these facilitators will prepare cohorts of principals to lead their school teams through this transition to blended learning.

### College Board Advanced Placement (AP) Summer Institutes

To assist the secondary schools in sustaining and/or building the AP programs in their schools, the Niswonger Foundation will offer up to a \$1500 scholarship reimbursement to these schools for teachers to attend AP Summer Institutes. Directors and principals have been provided the scholarship applications and nominations are currently being received. Top priority for scholarships will be AP teachers courses with updated examinations for 2016-17. These courses include Calculus AB-BC, European History, and Computer Science.



### Tenth Annual School Success Symposium

The 2016 School Success Symposium will be held on June 30, 2016. Sponsored by the Niswonger Foundation and Eastman Chemical Company, the Symposium will be held at the Niswonger Performing Arts Center and Greeneville High School. The theme will be "LET'S TALK LITERACY," in



recognition of Tennessee's focus on improving literacy skills and in support of the goal of 75 percent of Tennessee's students having the ability to score proficient or advanced in English language arts (ELA) by the end of third grade.

The keynote speaker is Craig Kielburger, co-founder of ME to WE ([www.we.org](http://www.we.org)), which empowers children to take their learning to their communities.

Mr. Kielburger says, "If you give kids the inspiration and tools to change the world, it will change their own lives." This event is for K-12 educators. The breakout sessions that follow the keynote speaker will focus on literacy development across the curriculum and will address the needs of children from all ability levels.

Registration is open on the Niswonger Foundation website or through this link:

<http://events.constantcontact.com/register/event?llr=6zxr9lsab&oeidk=a07ech903s0f9eaf1f2>

### Career and Technical Education

Professional development by Upper East Tennessee Regional Career and Technical Education (CTE) will be provided for any CTE teacher on June 14 and 15. The Niswonger Foundation will co-sponsor this event. CTE teachers from each program of study will have the opportunity to collaborate on curriculum and standards with business and industry and post-secondary representatives. Our CTE Directors will serve as the facilitators for these sessions. The event will be held at Sullivan Central High School.



### Advanced Placement (AP) Summer Academies

Professional development opportunities will be provided for current AP teachers in AP Language and Composition/Literature and Composition, Biology, Chemistry, Calculus AB/BC, American History, European History, and Human Geography. These academies are led by AP teachers with exceptional test score achievements. AP teachers will learn, share, and build professional collaborative relationships that will last throughout the school year as they share instruction and test preparation ideas. Registration will open soon for these AP Summer Academies which will be held in July. Information will be provided at [www.niswongerfoundation.org](http://www.niswongerfoundation.org).



## We Welcome Our Newest Niswonger Scholars



*Niswonger Scholars Class of 2020*

Two thousand sixteen is the 15th year for the Niswonger Scholars program. Five new high school seniors were selected, in November 2015, to join the Niswonger Foundation's distinguished Scholarship and Leadership program. Currently, there are 20 Scholars, with the newly selected students for 2016 bringing the total to 25. The Foundation also has 57 Alumni of the program. The newest Scholars and their families were welcomed at the Annual New Scholars Dinner on Thursday, April 21, at the General Morgan Inn in Greeneville.

The Niswonger Foundation is establishing a legacy of leadership through this program. We know of no other Scholarship and Leadership program like ours in the United States. Niswonger Scholars are selected through a nomination process that seeks to identify the region's best and brightest future leaders. They are given the opportunity to attend the college or university that will best prepare them for success in their field of study, while participating in our four-year leadership program. Through an emphasis on leadership, business management, community service and ethical decision making, the Scholars are provided travel, training, internships, and personalized support to become model leaders and citizens of the world.

What makes this program unique to all other scholarships is that the goal is to identify and develop leaders for Northeast Tennessee. These students commit to returning, within seven years, to Northeast Tennessee to work in their chosen career one year for each year they receive our scholarship. The plan is that by enabling these students to pursue their academic passion and by cultivating their leadership abilities, they will be committed to returning to their "roots" and being catalysts for the growth and improvement of their communities.

The five newest Scholars are Savannah Agan, Unaka High School; Christian Dalton, Hancock County High School; Elijah "Bo" Pless, Elizabethton High School; Tanner Shivley, Sullivan South High School; Kori Smith, Chuckey-Doak High School.



**Savannah Rose Agan** is a senior at Unaka High School in Elizabethton. She has served as Chapter FFA president and as secretary for the Eastern Region FFA and for the Appalachian Fair Youth Board. She is a member of 4-H Wildlife team, 4-H Forestry team, and FFA Agricultural Sales team. Her awards include, FFA GOLD Leadership Award, State FFA Degree recipient, state finalist in Agricultural Sales Competition, state finalist in Small Animal Production & Care Proficiency, and 7th place high

individual in wildlife judging competition. Savannah has completed community service with the National FFA Organization, Health Occupations Students of America, 4-H, Johnson County High School and the Key Club. Her parents are Jerry and Amanda Agan.



**Christian Michael Dalton** attends Hancock County High School in Sneedville, where he earned a 4.0 GPA. He serves as president of HCHS Student Council, vice president of the Sneedville chapter of FFA, Senior Representative on the Tennessee 4-H State Council and as an Upper 8 Scout for the Tennessee 4-H Eastern Region All Star Council. He is a member of the 4-H Honor Club, 4-H All-Stars and 4-H Livestock, Land & Soil and Wildlife Judging Teams. He was nominated for and received "Vol State" at the 2015 4-H Roundup. He has completed numerous community service hours through 4-H and FFA. Christian is the son of Rita Dalton.



**Elijah Charles "Bo" Pless** is a student at Elizabethton High School. He has served as Executive Board Member and Senior Class Secretary for the Student Government Association, vice president of the Carter County Chamber of Commerce Youth Leadership Group and Calvary Baptist Church's Student Leaders in Christ Council. His awards include, Tennessee Division 2 Class AA State Marching Band Champion, Most Outstanding Band Student, Wynell White Biology Award and Paul H. Pless Award. He has co-authored a book "Footprints of Appalachia". He is very active in Varsity Basketball and Varsity Baseball at EHS. Bo has completed a number of community service hours through Mission Fuge Camps, Hale Community Ministries, Carter County Chamber of Commerce and Race for Wandell. He is the son of Eddie and Kim Pless.



**Tanner Lynn Shivley** attends Sullivan South High School. He is a member of Sullivan South Baseball Team, National Honor Society, Beta Club, National Society of High School Scholars and Health Occupations Society of America. His awards include Honorary Usher- Senior Honors and Commencement, faculty nominee for Mr. Sullivan South and American Legion Boys' State-Tennessee Technological University. He is active in his community through Cornerstone Fellowship Church, ER and Pediatrics at Wellmont Medical Center, Salvation Army, United Way, Boys and Girls Club and Saving Grace Baptist Church. Tanner is the son of Terry Shivley and Tammy and Robert Jarvis.



**Kori Lynn Smith** is a senior at Chuckey-Doak High School. She is president of her senior class, vice president of the Chuckey-Doak FFA, Co-Captain of the Greene County and City Schools' Destination Imagination Team, Co-Captain of the Lady Knight's Soccer Team and Co-Captain of the Lady Knight's Tennis Team. She is a member of the Black Knight's Nation, the Chuckey-Doak Marching Band, Spanish Club, Tusculum College's Upward Bound Program and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. She is a graduate of the Greene County Youth Leadership. She has completed many community service hours through Destination Imagination and First Church of God. She is the daughter of Gena Shipley.

## Welcome Class of 2020!

## John Tweed Joins Niswonger Foundation Board



John Tweed

The Niswonger Foundation is pleased to welcome John Tweed as the newest member of the Niswonger Foundation Board of Directors. With extensive experience as both an entrepreneur and an executive in the distribution and freight transportation industries, John Tweed is the chief executive responsible for the strategic direction, operation and financial performance of Landair.

He and his leadership team oversee management of all Landair operations and customer service. Those day-to-day operations include logistics strategy development and implementation, sales

and marketing, fleet operations and maintenance, recruiting, finance, safety and

information technology, as well as the company's continuous improvement and environmental sustainability initiatives.

Tweed was named Landair's CEO in 2000, 15 years after he joined the company and following positions as the company's vice president of sales and as special-projects manager. In 1996 he founded Warehouse Logistics LLC, a contract distribution services company, jointly owned with Landair's founder, Scott M. Niswonger. Warehouse Logistics later merged with Landair, strengthening the company's warehouse distribution operations and capabilities.

Tweed holds a Bachelor of Science degree in business administration from East Tennessee State University. Recently, he was inducted into the *ETSU Business and Technology Hall of Fame*. He is an active committee and board member for several industry associations and community organizations.

John Tweed joins Scott M. Niswonger, Chairman and Founder; Nikki Niswonger, Secretary; Alan Levine and Dr. Nancy Dishner as members of the Niswonger Foundation Board of Directors.

## Preparing Students for a Successful Future

### *Summer Code Camps Provide Important Skills Development*

It has been said that "coding is the reading and writing of the next generation." Simply stated, coding is being able to tell a smart phone application or a computer what you need it to do. What has become increasingly more evident is that the earlier students begin to understand the logic and creative reasoning skills needed to develop expertise with coding, the more likely it is that they will be prepared for the current and future job force. Being referred to as the "new literacy," coding helps students to develop critical thinking skills and improves their ability to analyze and solve problems. And just as students learn science and reading to understand the world around them, computers are an integral part of their lives and their futures.

The Niswonger Foundation is entering its third year of providing opportunities for students to learn and practice coding skills. Weeklong code camps have been provided in the summers of 2014 and 2015, with nearly 200 participants. The instructors and families have seen students thrive... as they learn to apply the logic involved in coding, exhibit pride in their finished projects, and some even make firm commitments toward a career path in an "in-demand" area of the workforce. Additional camps will be provided this summer with some significant enhancements.

Classes this year will offer student choice from among a wider range of coding options, including game development, developing web applications, working with digital media, etc. Camps will, again, be offered for middle and high school students. Camps that are advanced and more focused will be offered for the first time. Students who have completed an introductory

course will be encouraged to participate in a more rigorous program.

The Niswonger Foundation will, again, co-sponsor events designed to encourage young women to

participate in coding awareness events and camps to introduce STEM-career possibilities. Scheduled events include daylong "Girls of Code" and weeklong "ETSU Girls in Science & Technology (GIST)" camps.

As a complement to the scheduled events (13 at present), there is an ongoing effort to identify new partnerships and locations for replicating the scheduled opportunities. As an example, CAD camps will allow students to explore computer-aided design and 3-D printing. A particularly impressive addition to the activities will be a mobile lab to offer events in more rural areas of

Northeast Tennessee where the technical capacity to offer classes would not be available otherwise.

Students report that the best aspect of code camps is that they are "FUN." Students are delighted to have the opportunity to "learn this new language," giving them the skills to design games, produce animation and, importantly, stretch their imaginations. Code camps are a great addition to summer vacation.

A complete listing of the Niswonger Foundation code camps and details for registration can be found at [www.niswongerfoundation.org](http://www.niswongerfoundation.org).



*"Classes this year will offer student choice from among a wider range of coding options, including game development, developing web applications, working with digital media, etc."*



## Third Annual Counselor Convening

### *Offers "Inspired" Theme*

Providing quality professional development to support the efforts of our high school counselors continues to be a major focus of the work of the Niswonger Foundation. Through our annual "Counselor Convening" we are able to bring together our NiswongerCARE advising staff along with the region's school counselors, the financial aid and admissions counselors from the post-secondary institutions, and other college access professionals for an opportunity to refine their skills and build networks.

The Niswonger Foundation will host the Third Annual School Counselor Convening on Monday, June 27, 2016, 8:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m., at Northeast State Community College. The theme for this year's Convening is "Inspired," in honor of the commitment of our school counselors to ensure that students in Northeast Tennessee graduate from high school prepared for post-secondary education, and on a successful career path.

This year's keynote speaker is Kim Weitkamp. As a humorist, consultant, singer, songwriter, entrepreneur, she shares

her story and encourages others to do the same.

This is one of many exciting opportunities and speakers planned for the day. Registration information will be sent directly to Northeast Tennessee counselors and college access professionals. Contact Denise Arnold (darnold@niswongerfoundation.org) or Barbara Bates (barbara.bates@niswongerfoundation.org) for assistance with registration or answers to questions.

*"This year's keynote speaker is Kim Weitkamp. As a humorist, consultant, singer, songwriter, entrepreneur, she shares her story and encourages others to do the same."*

## NiswongerCARE Advisor Spotlight

### *Lucas Hitechew Focuses on Student Success*



Lucas Hitechew

Today's students have grown up in a world of convenience - fast food, one stop shopping, and the internet. These have made life easier and information more accessible. With this reality in mind, Lucas Hitechew, NiswongerCARE Advisor, designed a website to reach parents and students in Carter County. Lucas says, "My intention with it (the website) was to create a hub for any and all college and career information so that parents and students could easily find everything they need in one place."

The website features information and links for both students and parents regarding the college-going process. From "choosing a major" to "what to pack," students and parents can find what they need on Lucas's website. He states on the website, "It is my mission to provide the skills and knowledge that every student needs to succeed and find happiness in their life."

The website ([www.ncarecarter.weebly.com](http://www.ncarecarter.weebly.com)) is one tool Lucas uses to fulfill his mission.

### **NISWONGERCARE ADVISOR FACTS**

#### **First Semester:**

2784 individual student meetings held  
1835 students assisted in completing TN Promise applications  
1034 students assisted in registering for the ACT  
175 group presentations

## NiswongerCARE Advisors

### *Plan Spring and Summer Activities*

In 2015, the Niswonger Foundation was the recipient of a grant from the Care Foundation of America that established the NiswongerCARE program. This initiative is focused on post-secondary and career readiness, and is supported by a team of professional counselors, "near-peer" baccalaureate level specialists, and interns from the region's school counseling programs at Milligan College, Carson-Newman University and East Tennessee State University. Through this effort, students in 31 high schools in Northeast Tennessee are being assisted in planning for college and careers.

### **Spring Activities**

Plans are being developed for spring activities in each of the 31 high schools served by NiswongerCARE Advisors. "Path to College" events occur statewide and are designed to promote a college going culture within each school. "College Signing Day" honors and celebrates seniors as they look to the future. "College Planning Night" is a time to educate juniors and their parents regarding senior year activities that will prepare them for college selection and the admissions process. Advisors have used their creativity to design programs that will attract high school students and be of assistance to their families.

*"NiswongerCARE Advisors are preparing for the 'Summer Melt' initiative. A nationally recognized term, 'Summer Melt' refers to the phenomenon in which students leave high school with college plans but fail to enter college the following fall."*

### **Summer Activities**

NiswongerCARE Advisors are preparing for the "Summer Melt" initiative. A nationally recognized term, "Summer Melt" refers to the phenomenon in which students leave high school with college plans but fail to enter college the following fall. There are numerous reasons "summer melt" occurs, including anticipation about the new experience, family pressures, ability to navigate the orientation and final admissions processes, and financial concerns. Studies have demonstrated that continued intervention from trusted professionals can significantly impact the potential for the student to successfully enter post-secondary education.

The value of text messaging reminders, during the summer, is one method that has been proven successful. To this end, the Advisors will be using a texting platform that provides checklists to students of tasks that need to be completed before the fall semester begins. The Advisors will be targeting students most at risk of succumbing to "Summer Melt" and sending personalized text reminders of their tasks. In addition, the NiswongerCARE Advisors will have scheduled office days in which they are available at high school, or nearby, locations. Students and parents can stop by at their convenience for personalized assistance.

Another component of the "Summer Melt" initiative is assisting area colleges during freshman orientation programs. The Advisors will be present at orientations for Walters State Community College, Northeast State Community College, and East Tennessee State University.

## “College Signing Day”

### *Showcases Students’ Next Steps*

Sullivan Central High School’s **College Signing Day** celebrated the Class of 2016 and their college choices. NiswongerCARE Advisor, Allison Eastridge, planned the event for Friday, April 8. In the weeks prior to the event, Allison and the school counselors asked seniors to bring a copy of their admissions letters to the counseling office. Those seniors were then invited to meet in the media center during their lunch periods, where they were treated to cake, chips, cookies, a photo booth, and a banner to sign.

Seniors enjoyed the celebration of their commitments to attend colleges including Northeast State Community College, East Tennessee State University, University of Tennessee-Knoxville, Carson-Newman University and Virginia Military Institute, to name a few. According to Sullivan Central counselors, Brittany Jones, Sarah Patrick, and Katie Reed, the success of this initial effort will ensure that this becomes an annual event.

Katie Norton, NiswongerCARE advisor at Elizabethton High School, is planning for an exciting Senior Week of celebration with a focus on the future. Activities will include a series of Spirit Days showcasing school colors, “decking the halls” with signs sharing where students will be attending college, and “walking yearbooks” where students sign each other’s tee shirts. The culminating celebration will be an event in the new EHS football stadium.



At South Greene High School, NiswongerCARE advisor Chris Burns has created a display listing the colleges attended by each SGHS teacher, along with pictures. Students are encouraged to add their pictures alongside the colleges they will attend.

Similar events are being planned for high schools all over the region. Celebrations will include a variety of activities from bulletin boards detailing senior plans, to full-school assemblies with “pep rally” enthusiasm.

Thanks to our NiswongerCARE advisors for sharing their creativity and enthusiasm, and... Congratulations to the **Class of 2016!**

## NiswongerCARE Advisor Addresses Need

### *Individualizing Assistance with Financial Aid*

The cost of post-secondary education can seem like an insurmountable obstacle between a high school student and the future. Even though the opportunity for financial assistance is readily available, the application process can be daunting. This is particularly true for first-generation college students and families.

Jefferson County High School students and their families were recently offered an opportunity to receive individualized assistance with filing the *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA). Bailey Mays, NiswongerCARE Advisor, was listening when her students expressed their concerns about being able to complete the financial aid process. With TN Promise deadlines looming, she responded by working with the School Counselors to organize a “*FAFSA Completion*” event held on February 8, 2016.

The FAFSA is a critical step in preparing for college and Bailey wanted to insure that the students who came were celebrated for taking the initiative to seek extra assistance. School counselors greeted everyone as they signed in. The office was filled with balloons, a welcome sign, and refreshments for them to enjoy while they waited.

Bailey, along with two members of the NiswongerCARE Leadership team helped over 20 students and their families to successfully submit their FAFSA. One parent’s eyes filled with tears after she clicked the submit button and realized that college was going to be a reality for her daughter. Another parent expressed that she would never have gotten through the process without someone to support her. At the end of the evening, Bailey commented, “This took a lot of planning, but I feel like I played a part in changing the lives of these students!”

This is only one example of the FAFSA Completion Events being hosted by NiswongerCARE advisors throughout the region this spring. The desire is to eliminate all barriers between the region’s high school students and their enrollment in post-secondary education.

*“One parent’s eyes filled with tears after she clicked the submit button and realized that college was going to be a reality for her daughter.”*

## Niswonger Foundation Staff Honor Board Members

### *In Support of the Hope Center of Greeneville*

The Christmas Season formerly involved Niswonger Foundation Staff members gathering to exchange personal holiday gifts. For the past several years, the staff of the Niswonger Foundation has joined in a greater cause in support of the Hope Center, of Greeneville. The Hope Center exists to serve the needs of those who may find themselves in a crisis pregnancy, as well as having resources available for expectant mothers and parents who need help in caring for their young children, such as diapers, baby wipes, clothing, etc. They also strive to provide guidance in giving a spiritual foundation for their families, as well as educational opportunities to enable them to be productive members of our community.

Again this year, in lieu of personal gifts, the staff of the Niswonger Foundation provided a full Christmas (clothes, books, toys, etc.) for 16 of the children being served by the Hope Center. This contribution was given in loving honor of the Niswonger Foundation Board of Directors, for their tireless efforts to ensure the success of the Niswonger Foundation.





# A Tribute to the Graduating Seniors

## Scholars Share "What's Next"



### Michael "Gage" Armstrong

*East Tennessee State University*

The last four years I have spent as a college student have been an incredibly rewarding period of my life. I have grown intellectually, spiritually, and professionally more than the entirety of my previous educational experiences. As a Niswonger Scholar, I have been blessed with an extended support group that has both helped me through the most difficult periods of my college experience, and cheered me on

during my biggest successes. This support came from the other Scholars and the staff at the Niswonger Foundation, as I cannot think of a single individual who has not somehow contributed to my growth. With such a diverse and exceptional group of fellow Scholars surrounding me, I have learned a lot from being able to watch my peers excel in areas where I may sometimes struggle. The environment created by the entire program and all of the people in it allowed me to get more out of my college experience than many students do, and for this I am truly thankful.

I will be graduating this year, and I am extremely excited about starting the next chapter in my life. This summer I will be going abroad to the Azores Islands to shadow physicians and work in a local hospital. I will also teach English language courses and learn from both the people I interact with and the culture of a small isolated island, not so much unlike this rural region of Appalachia that I so dearly love. I know this will be another wonderful growth opportunity, and I pray it will help me better understand how to serve others. Upon my return, I plan to continue working in a laboratory setting as a research technician while I develop myself in preparation for the next step in my educational career. I have enjoyed my last two years being involved in scientific research immensely, and I know there is still much for me to learn before I move on. After more personal development and continued exposure in healthcare around the area, I plan to attend medical school so that I may once again return to my home in Northeast Tennessee to serve as a loving and caring physician and citizen.

Although I sometimes struggled during my college career, I know that through God's grace and the love and advice from the people he has put into my life that everything happened just as it was meant to. I cannot thank all of those who have supported me enough, but I do want to personally thank Scott and Nikki Niswonger for being living examples of what it means to love and care for those around you. I have faith that my fellow Scholars and I can do this region and the people in it proud, not by being perfect, but by following your example of serving with our entire hearts.



### Ivory Janee Shelton

*Wake Forest University*

It seems hard to believe (as cliché as the phrase may be) that a mere four years ago I was receiving my acceptance to Wake Forest and meeting my fellow Scholars Class of 2016. What is even harder to believe, however, is the fact that all of it (my days as an undergrad, my days as a Scholar) are coming to a close. Somehow, I have been blessed enough to step into even more exciting and purpose-filled roles: those of medical student and Alumni Scholar.

In terms of the first role, I am happy to say that I have decided to matriculate with the Class of 2020 at Wake Forest University School of Medicine in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Though I am looking to keep a very open mind during my 3rd and 4th year clinical rotations, my inclinations for specialty at the moment are towards either Emergency Medicine or OB/GYN. With each/either of these specialties, I am researching the possibility of an MD/MPH (Masters in Public Health) dual degree, with a focus in public health policy and management.

Connecting these possible career paths to my second role as an Alumni Scholar, I am lucky enough to live in an area rich in both hospitals and healthcare opportunities. I look forward to the opportunity to return to the area and to become an advocate for both patient-centered healthcare and women's healthcare, with the intention of continually improving both in our region. Going further, I am absolutely thrilled at the thought of returning and reconnecting with the powerhouse that is the Niswonger Alumni Network. From healthcare to engineering, and from education to business, I foresee our ability (as it goes in Mr. Niswonger's favorite book) "to paint the flowers" in upper East Tennessee and to leave it more vibrant and more prosperous than we found it.

Which brings me to my final point: none of my goals and none of my upcoming roles could possibly have been achieved without the help of the Niswonger Foundation, the immense generosity of Scott Niswonger, and the presence of Nikki Niswonger, Dr. Nancy Dishner, Barbara Bates, and the entire Foundation staff.

I have traveled abroad; I have studied at one of the premier institutions in the country, and I have met four young men whom I now regard as life-long friends and as brothers. I have honed my skills as a leader, expanded my mind as a Scholar, and enriched my heart as a human being. As I move forward in my life, I hope that as I have "learned" and "earned" (as well as grown, lived, and experienced) in these past four years, I can "return" and give back to the Foundation and to the region one hundred fold.

*"You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God." 2 Corinthians 9:11 (ESV)*



### Nathaniel "Trey" Xavier Dodson, III

*Vanderbilt University*

How fast the past four years have flown by! It honestly seems like only yesterday that I was nervously getting my dad to tie my tie for the first round of Niswonger interviews. Four years later, I still can't tie my own tie, but am an otherwise completely transformed human being. A lion's share of the credit goes towards the blessing that the Niswonger Foundation

and family has been to my life. I enjoyed this journey with four of the best people I have ever met. I couldn't have asked for a better Scholar class than Matt, Gage, Ivory, and Richard. From day one, we gelled together in a way that was unmatched by any other group that I have been a part of. From cruising around the Bahamas on Scott Free to playing pick-up basketball in my front yard, these four helped create memories that I will one day convey to my grandchildren.

Mr. Niswonger has created something truly spectacular. When I share with my friends on Vanderbilt's campus that I am a Niswonger Scholar, all of them ask the same resounding "Why doesn't my home community have something like that?" And I tell them it's because hearts as big as Scott's don't exist everywhere. It takes a special kind of man to do what Scott Niswonger has done not only for the Scholars, but for the entire region, at large. My experience with the Niswonger Foundation has single handedly made the last four years the best four years of my life. I could not imagine where I would be without all of the training, guidance, and outright love over the course of my college career. I came into the Foundation a timid, nervous boy from the hills of Dumplin Valley and I am leaving the Foundation a confident, self-assured man.

Upon graduation from Vanderbilt this spring, I will be moving to Dallas, Texas to begin working as a Human Capital Business Analyst for Deloitte Consulting LLP. One of the benefits of completing the analyst program at Deloitte is that Deloitte will pay for its consultants to attend graduate school. Upon completion of the analyst program, I will pursue a Master's Degree in Education before returning to Northeast Tennessee to begin my career as a professor. A major theme we discuss as Niswonger Scholars is planting seeds within the region that will eventually grow into fruit-producing trees. Becoming a professor of Business in the region is the medium I will use to plant these seeds. I will push my students to take the concepts they learn in my class and apply them to fulfilling the unique needs of our region until one day Northeast Tennessee is an orchard of trees marveled, revered, and respected by all in this nation.





## Richard Wade Vradenburgh

Tennessee Technological University

I am excited and tremendously honored to proclaim that I will soon move into the ranks of the "Niswonger Alumni Scholars." This large, growing, collection of people forms a network of talented professionals who are finding novel ways of giving back (and forward!) to their communities through their jobs and spare time. Their lives provide concrete examples of what the philosophy *Learn, Earn, and Return* means and how it can take form. During my time in

the formative period of the Niswonger scholarship program, my personal schema of a Niswonger Scholar has developed significantly, and I would like to share a bit about what this title means to me. Being a Niswonger Scholar involves:

*Genuinely loving your home community.* This cuts to the very core of what this scholarship program is all about; it's the foundation upon which all the training is laid. This is a trait which Mr. and Mrs. Niswonger, the Niswonger Foundation staff, and so many of the Alumni Scholars exhibit vividly, and it is the major theme of all the scholarship training sessions. It is quite easy to have no reservations about fulfilling the "*Learn*" and "*Earn*" commitments, but there is a cost associated with the "*Return*." For the Niswonger Scholar, the sacrifice of saying no to some open doors is worth it because nothing can surpass the reward of living in, working in, and changing the special place called home.

*Focusing on 'what if' rather than 'what is.'* This really goes back to loving your community. It is easy to be discouraged by the complex educational, economic, and societal issues of the day, but, after recognizing these problems, we must be able look past them to the possibilities of the future. Real positive change comes about not by simply mending current problems but by infectious spreading the positive perspective that people can get on board with.

*Actively taking on leadership roles.* To be honest, I never really saw myself becoming a leader until I understood what a leader is. A leader is a primary source of a vision that can be shared by a group to bring about an objective. To be a Niswonger Scholar is, in a sense, to be a bit of a visionary. Being in this scholarship program has allowed me to learn from many knowledgeable and experienced leaders about how to effectively disseminate and implement powerful ideas that can bring about positive change.

In a few short weeks, I will graduate from Tennessee Tech University with a B.S. in Mathematics, and I will begin PhD work at the University of Virginia in fall of 2016. I have been offered both a fellowship and summer funding for this program. After completing graduate school, I will be looking to work as a math professor in upper east Tennessee. I would also love to work as an educator in summer STEM training programs for local high school students. My broad goal is to improve the quality of STEM education, at all levels, in Northeast Tennessee.

**Special Note** – Matthew Stephen Sheppard is the fifth member of the Class of 2016. Matthew completed a full year co-op program with General Electric Lighting in Hendersonville, North Carolina in 2015. He is a student at Clemson University majoring in industrial engineering. He has returned to Clemson to complete his senior year. Matthew will graduate with the Niswonger Scholars Class of 2017.



## Holiday Luncheon Honors Niswonger Foundation Staff

The Staff of the Niswonger Foundation gathered to celebrate the 2015 holiday season, on December 18, at the Dining Room, in Jonesborough. The highlight of the event was the NiswongerCARE Advisors sharing their success stories and experiences of their first five months in the Niswonger Consortium's 31 high schools.

## Niswonger Scholars Gather for Winter Training

The 2015 Niswonger Scholars Winter Training began with the early arrival of the Freshmen Scholars. The newest members of the scholarship and leadership program are provided a debriefing session regarding their first semester in college. The five members of the Class of 2019 shared the highlights and challenges of the first taste of college life and had the opportunity to become better acquainted with the other members of their class.

Soon, 20 Scholars had gathered at the General Morgan Inn, in Greeneville, for a two-day training program. The book "*Some of My Best Friends are Black*," by Tanner Colby, was the required reading for the event. Senior Scholar, Trey Dodson, joined Dr. Nancy Dishner as the program presenters. The focus of the discussion was on understanding diversity and, more importantly, our personal views regarding diversity. The Scholars were taken through a series of in-depth activities that allowed them to examine personal biases and gain understanding about how our cultural perspectives and personal histories play a critical role in our relationship with others.

Following Winter Training, Trey Dodson was tapped to conduct this training on the Vanderbilt University campus.



## Niswonger Scholar Alumni Celebrate with Holiday Reunion

Essential to the success of the mission of the Niswonger Foundation's Scholarship and Leadership program, and what makes this program unique to any other in the nation, is that Niswonger Scholars are committed to returning to Northeast Tennessee to be leaders for the region and role models for the Scholars who follow them. On December 19, 2015, Alumni of the Niswonger Scholars program, with their spouses or guests, joined together to share the stories of their lives, reminisce about Scholar memories and plan for future activities in Northeast Tennessee.

This year, the Alumni hosted a representative from Leadership Tennessee, Kate Stone, who has enlisted the help of the Alumni in developing a leadership project for Northeast Tennessee. The initial discussion and planning began at this meeting. Additional meetings will continue throughout the spring.

Following the formal discussion and planning session, the Alumni, spouses, guests, staff and Board Members enjoyed a reception, dinner and the opportunity to recall wonderful memories.





### OUR MISSION:

*To create opportunities for individual and community growth through education and other sustainable projects.*

For more information regarding our Foundation, contact:

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### BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND OFFICERS:

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Denise Arnold  
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Kathy O'Dell  
Office Manager

Barbara Bates  
Executive Assistant

## Alumni Scholar News



### Dr. Katie Baker

(Class of 2007) received a grant titled "Exploring Adverse Childhood Experiences among Mothers and Daughters in South Central Appalachia" from the ETSU Research Development Committee.

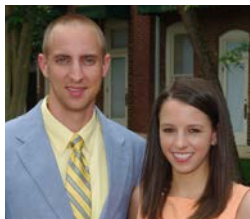
Dr. Baker was the keynote speaker for the 2016 Greeneville City Schools Education Foundation CORE Champion Awards ceremony in April.

### Matthew Bible

(Class of 2011) and

### Lauren Bible

(Class of 2011) are the proud parents of a baby girl. Evelyn Kate was born on April 4.



### Patrick Brown

(Class of 2009) is now licensed as a professional landscape architect.

### Dr. Jessica Epley Burchette

(Class of 2006) was married to Darrin Burchette on February 20. Dr. Burchette was honored by the Class of 2017 at the Bill Gatton College of Pharmacy with the Outstanding Clinical Preceptor award for 2015-16.



### Dr. Tom Cully

(Class of 2010) and his wife Olivia welcomed a new baby boy, Abram James, into their family on January 2.

### Abigail Ricica Daniels

(Class of 2010) was married to Brett Daniels in December.



### Ben Fox

(Class of 2009) has been promoted to Offensive Coordinator/Quarterbacks Coach at Huntingdon College in Montgomery, Alabama. He and his wife Katie are expecting their first child in the summer.

### Emily Hollingsworth

(Class of 2011) has accepted a position as production manager with Pyxl in Knoxville. She will be managing projects in four office locations.



### Dr. Jordan Kim

(Class of 2012) graduated from East Tennessee State University's Quillen College of Medicine, in December. He will be completing his residency in Family Medicine at Erlanger Health System, University of Tennessee College of Medicine-Chattanooga.

### Dr. Morgan Hammer Krapf

(Class of 2006) and her husband Justin welcomed a new baby girl, Mackenzie Alexandra, on January 12.



### Rachel Mixon

(Class of 2011) is now Process & Tooling Engineer at ELSA LLC in Indianapolis.

### Virginia Hines Pfeifer

(Class of 2007) and her husband Chris became the proud parents of a son, August Christopher, on March 23rd.



### Lillie Seal

(Class of 2015) has been accepted to the master's degree program in Curriculum and Instruction at Carson-Newman University. She has accepted a position at Jefferson County High School as 10th grade English teacher.

### Todd Skelton

(Class of 2010) has been selected as Governor Haslam's designee for the Tennessee Interagency Council on Homelessness.



### Christopher Steadman

(Class of 2015) has been accepted to the ETSU Quillen College of Medicine. He is currently working as an anesthesia technician in the operating room at Holston Valley Medical Center in Kingsport.

### Yaying Wang

(Class of 2014) accepted a position as a nurse technician, in oncology, at Emory University Hospital.



### Elizabeth Williams

(Class of 2006) became a member of the Noon Rotary Club in Johnson City.



## Niswonger Scholars Shine



### Hope Adkins

(Carson-Newman University, sophomore) is a new member of Theta Alpha Kappa. She has been elected chaplain of Carson Newman's chapter of Chi Lambda Sigma. She has accepted an invitation to

join Kappa Omnicron Nu. She has been selected as Children's Ministry Intern at First Baptist Church, Jefferson City. Hope represented Carson-Newman at CNU day on the hill in Nashville.

### Gage Armstrong

(East Tennessee State University, senior) presented his thesis entitled "Effect of zymosan-induced peritonitis on the expression of substance P in primary sensory neurons and spinal nerve processes" at the East Tennessee State University's Boland Research Symposium in March. Gage will participate in a "shadow abroad" experience this summer in Terceira, the Azores, Portugal. He will work in a hospital, and will be teaching English.



### Trey Dodson

(Vanderbilt University, senior) has accepted a position with Deloitte Consulting LLP. He directed and installed a new diversity and inclusion curriculum for 350 incoming Greek members on Vanderbilt's campus. He broke the tour guide record at Vanderbilt for most tours given in a semester. He has been nominated for the Outstanding Leadership Award at Vanderbilt. Trey was selected emcee for Vanderbilt's annual Magnolia Awards.

### Matthew Grimm

(University of Tennessee, junior) has been selected for a Summer Undergraduate Research Internship. His project will be "Predictive Risk Assessment Model for 30-Day Readmissions among Heart Failure Patients in Southeast Appalachia."



### Dustin Howser

(Vanderbilt University, junior) has been named a field engineer with the Vanderbilt Aerospace Laboratory, which has won the National NASA Student Launch Competition for the past

three years. He has also designed a passive lower limb human exoskeleton in the biomechanics research lab at Vanderbilt that is being considered for part of a larger patent. He has been named vice president of the Vanderbilt Aerospace Design Laboratory, with which he will be pursuing his senior design. Dustin accepted an internship with Vextec in Brentwood, Tennessee for the summer.

### McKenzie Reynolds

(University of Tennessee, sophomore) has been selected as secretary for her sorority, Zeta Tau Alpha. She has become a member of Aim Accounting Alliance. She will be an intern at Landair this summer.



### Kristen Alora Ricker

(Milligan College, sophomore) has been accepted into the Medical Horizons summer program at East Tennessee State University's Quillen College of Medicine.

### Matthew Sheppard

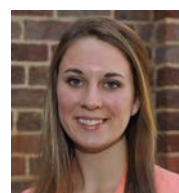
(Clemson University, senior) will complete an internship in Government Affairs at Eastman Chemical Company, summer 2016.



### Ivory Shelton

(Wake Forest University, senior) has been nominated by the Wake Forest faculty as a finalist for Graduation Senior Orator. Her research "Analyzing Stress in Female Medical Students" has been accepted

for presentation at the Wake Forest Women's and Gender Studies Fifth Annual Symposium on Gender and Sexuality in March. Ivory's Women's ministry "Delight" has received official Charter Status by way of Student Government and the University. She has been recognized as "Old Gold and Black Senior Profiles" representative for the Religious Studies Department at Wake Forest. She received the Currin Medal for her honors thesis at the Religion Department's senior banquet. Ivory will join the Class of 2016 at Wake Forest University Medical School.



### Katie Shields

(University of Tennessee, junior) completed an internship with Farm Credit Mid-America. She is working on an undergraduate research project of surveying and analyzing the current system of evaluating

agriculture educators in high school classrooms. She submitted an abstract for this research to Eureka, an undergraduate research symposium.

### Dillan Shults

(Tennessee Technological University, sophomore) has been selected as a member of the Mortar Board Society. Dustin was voted "Mr. Excellence" by his peers at the Theta Tau Formal.



### Madeline Standbridge

(University of Tennessee, sophomore) has been selected as a Leadership Knoxville Scholar. Madeline presented her research in Materials Science and Engineering at EURECA (Exhibition of Undergraduate Research and Creative Achievement) in April. Her poster won first place in the MABE category and the Gold award for the entire college of engineering.

### Morgan Thomas

(Clemson University, freshman) has been named to the Biological Sciences Dean's List at Clemson. She has been accepted to serve on Alpha Chi Omega's Intellectual Development Committee.



### Richard Vradenburgh

(Tennessee Technological University, senior) has enrolled in the PhD in Mathematics program at the University of Virginia.

### Zachary Ward

(University of Tennessee, freshman) has been accepted as a Vol Mentor at University of Tennessee-Knoxville.



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# Niswonger Foundation

*2016 Spring Newsletter*



*"The more you read, the more you know,  
the more places you'll go."  
- Dr. Seuss*

