

**Scholarship and Leadership
Niswonger Foundation Board Update
Thursday, August 8, 2024**

Summer Leadership Institute

The 2024 Summer Leadership Institute focused on “gaining perspective.” The classroom portion of the training was held in the Learning Center at the Niswonger Foundation. The textbook was “The Noticer,” by Andy Andrews. As they continued their discussion on gaining perspective, the Scholars traveled to Washington D.C. for an opportunity to more deeply connect with our nation’s history.

The Scholars joined a guided tour to view many of our Capital’s most significant memorials: Jefferson, Lincoln, Roosevelt and King. Monuments included the Vietnam, Korean, and WWI. Two Smithsonian Museums were visited, Museum of Natural History and Museum of American History. The Scholars also visited the National Archives to view the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights. The private tour of the United State Capitol was arranged by Senator Marsha Blackburn’s staff. Senator Blackburn welcomed the Scholars to her Congressional Office, shared an overview of her work, answered questions, and joined the Scholars for a photo opportunity. Following the visit, the group enjoyed a detailed tour and discussion of the building’s history. Then, they were provided the opportunity to see the U.S. Senate in session.

The visit to the White House was particularly insightful for the Scholars, given that it was arranged by Niswonger Scholar Alumni, Ian Sams. Ian, a native of Johnson City, serves as Special Assistant to the President and Senior Advisor in the White House Counsel’s Office. The East Wing tour included additional rooms that have not been available to the public for several years. The Scholars, then, joined Ian for a question-and-answer session and a West Wing tour, which included a viewing of the Oval Office and the White House Press Briefing Room. To conclude the visit, the Scholars toured the United States Holocaust Museum. This experience was intended to bring their thoughts full circle as they gained additional perspective to further inform their learnings from the discussion of their textbook, and their visit to Normandy.

Niswonger Scholar, Derek Driskill, shared the following perspective regarding this opportunity: *“Visiting Washington DC was an unforgettable experience that deeply enriched my understanding of true leadership and the importance of public service. Interacting firsthand with influential leaders and policymakers has inspired me to take a more active role in civic engagement. The trip strengthened my commitment to the Northeast Tennessee community, as well as my resolve to make meaningful contributions through pursuing a career dedicated to public service. Our trip unlocked a deeper understanding of our nation’s past, present, and future, leaving me forever changed by its profound lessons in history and democracy.”* Derek was recently selected as a Governor’s Fellow, and will be serving Cocke County, Tennessee.

Scholars Travel to Normandy

- The graduating Niswonger Scholars traveled to Normandy, Paris and London. The major focus of the trip was five days of WWII history in Normandy, visiting Omaha, Utah, Sword, Gold and Juno Beaches, Arromanches, Sainte-Mere Eglise, Bayeux and the Bayeux Tapestry, American Cemetery, Normandy-American Cemetery, La Combe (German Cemetery), Pointe

du Hoc, Rouen, Pegasus Bridge, Caen and the WWII Museum, and other WWII sites. Time in Normandy also included Honfleur and Mont St. Michel. The Scholars also enjoyed exploring Paris, then riding the Eurostar to London. Many sites were visited, and experiences had in both cities, including the Churchill War Rooms.

Next Steps for the Scholars

- Gustavo Castillo, Embedded Teacher, Hamblen County Schools (College of Charleston)
- Trent Dickerson, Engineering Specialist, Denso, Maryville, TN (University of Tennessee)
- Derek Driskill, Governor's Fellow, Cocke County Tennessee (Carson Newman University)
- Sam Hensley, Analytical Lab Technician, Artazn, Greeneville (East Tennessee State University)
- Macy Noe, Kimley-Horn, Engineering Analyst (Vanderbilt University)
- Mabel Olson, Electrical Engineer, Eastman (Tennessee Technological University)

Scholar Academics

- The following Scholars obtained a 4.0 gpa for the Spring 2024 Semester: Derek Driskill (Carson Newman University); Mabel Olson (Tennessee Technological University)
- Completing his undergraduate degree in three years, Derek Driskill received a Masters in Business Administration in his fourth year as a Niswonger Scholar.
- While all Scholars complete a minimum of 40 hours of community service each semester, of special note, Trent Dickerson (University of Tennessee) completed 220 hours for the spring semester.

Recent Alumni Scholar Updates

- Please see attached updates.