Rockefeller Leadership Fellows
2020-2021 Report

Prepared by Maria Smith-Lopez & Sarah Solomon
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Executive Summary

This report contains data, findings, and feedback from the 2020-2021 Rockefeller Leadership Fellows Program. It includes a letter from the Student Assistants, an infographic page of RLF by the Numbers, profiles of the thirty-four 2020-2021 Rockefeller Leadership Fellows, a summary of attendance, and general feedback and recommendations on various aspects of the program. This report was compiled by Maria Smith-Lopez and Sarah Solomon, Student Program Assistants, and includes insights from all Fellows.
Letter from the Student Assistants

2020 was an unprecedented year that impacted all aspects of Dartmouth College, including Rockefeller Center programming. As a result, the Rockefeller Leadership Fellows program was completely reimagined and repurposed for a year marked by new challenges and physical distance. The program remained true to its original mission of providing a capstone leadership development experience for Dartmouth seniors but did so in a completely new format. Even the application process was different for this cohort of Fellows, with an extended application deadline, optional letters of recommendation, and interviews conducted virtually through the hiring platform Kira. For the entire program, the Fellows were split into two cohorts, one that met synchronously over Zoom every Thursday for two hours and one that participated in programming asynchronously. Asynchronous participation included completing brief assignments, commenting on discussion boards on Canvas, and watching recordings of the synchronous sessions.

As student assistants, our responsibilities expanded to include fostering a community in a virtual setting, which was no easy task. While navigating the tumultuous final year of our Dartmouth education, we experienced firsthand the isolation and separation that was inevitable when interacting with our peers almost exclusively through computer screens. Bonding with new classmates has perennially been one of the most enjoyed aspects of RLF, so we endeavored to ensure this year’s cohorts would emerge with similar sentiments. It was a year-long learning process, and one that called upon us to draw from many of the topics explored by the program’s speakers. Clear and purposeful communication skills were critical, mindful consideration of others’ needs was paramount, and assessing team camaraderie was equally important; all of these skills were discussed by a number of speakers. We ended the year satisfied with the new relationships we developed and the opportunities we provided the Fellows to do the same. Although the lessons we learned may be derived from a particularly unique year of RLF, we strongly believe these lessons will be applicable to RLF in its conventional form and any other forms it may take going forward. We are extremely grateful for the experience to reflect on our leadership style, grow stronger as leaders, and directly apply our new skills by guiding our peers through a special year of RLF.

Sarah Solomon

Maria Smith-Lopez
15 majors represented

- **Humanities**: 7 majors
  - African and African American Studies
  - English
  - History
  - Italian Studies
  - Middle Eastern Studies
  - Philosophy
  - Studio Art

- **Social Science**: 4 majors
  - Economics
  - Geography
  - Government
  - Sociology

- **STEM**: 4 majors
  - Biology
  - Cognitive Science
  - Computer Science
  - Quantitative Social Science

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1 Fulbright English Teaching Assistant:  
Alex Soong

1 Pickering Fellow:  
Ameena Razzaque

1 Marine Corp Officer:  
Bobby Hobart

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**Gender Breakout of Fellows**

- Female: 31%
- Male: 69%

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1 Except for the section on gender, this infographic only represents the 22 Fellows who submitted responses to the end of the year survey.
Meet the Fellows

Synchronous

Tola Akinwumi
Hometown: Los Angeles
Major/Minor: Government and Spanish
On-Campus Leadership: Black Student-Athlete Alliance, Varsity Volleyball

Patrycja “Pat” Bazylczyk
Hometown: Fairfield, CT
Major/Minor: Government and Environmental Studies
On-Campus Leadership: Admissions ambassador, America Reads tutor

Jonathan Griffault
Hometown: New York City, NY
Major/Minor: Government, History, and Digital Arts
On-Campus Leadership: Hillel President, Student Assembly Vice President

Dustin Jones
Hometown: Los Angeles, CA
Major/Minor: Film and Media Studies
On-Campus Leadership: Programming Board, Dartmouth Minorities in Business Association

Oumy Kane
Hometown: New York City, NY
On-Campus Leadership: Council on Student Organizations, NAACP at Dartmouth

Arun Moganti
Hometown: Chicago, IL
Major/Minor: Economics and Government
On-Campus Leadership: Special Programs and Events Committee

David Niedzwicki
Hometown: Philadelphia, PA
Major/Minor: Government and Economics
On-Campus Leadership: Committee on Standards, Men’s Ultimate Frisbee

Oghenevboré "Esther" Omene
Hometown: Alpharetta, GA
Major/Minor: Computer Engineering
On-Campus Leadership: Afro-American Society, Hopkins Center of Arts manager

Elizabeth “Leeza” Poselski
Hometown: Moscow, Russia
Major/Minor: Geography and Studio Art
On-Campus Leadership: Office of Pluralism and Leadership, Varsity Volleyball

Neelufar Roja
Hometown: Cupertino, CA
Major/Minor: Biology and English
On-Campus Leadership: President of Al-Nur, Undergraduate adviser (UGA)
Dorley Sockitey
Hometown: Acra, Ghana
Major/Minor: Cognitive Science and Quantitative Social Science
On-Campus Leadership: DALI Lab, Dartmouth African Students Association

Sohaj Shah
Hometown: Austin, TX
Major/Minor: Biology and Computer Science
On-Campus Leadership: Dartmouth Emergency Medical Service, Health Access for All

Sarah Solomon
Hometown: Sharon, MA
Major/Minor: Quantitative Social Science, Middle Eastern Studies, and Government
On-Campus Leadership: World Outlook Journal of International Affairs, First-Year Trips

Jourdin Thomas
Hometown: Long Island, NY
Major/Minor: Neuroscience and Philosophy
On-Campus Leadership: Programming Board, First Year Student Enrichment Program mentor

Rachna Shah
Hometown: Barrington, IL
Major/Minor: History and Economics
On-Campus Leadership: Stamps Scholar, Dartmouth TAMID

Maria Smith-Lopez
Hometown: Laramie, WY
Major/Minor: Government, English, and Environmental Public Policy
On-Campus Leadership: Dartmouth Running Team, Elections Planning & Advisory Committee

Alexander “Alex” Soong
Hometown: Baltimore, MD
Major/Minor: Romance Languages, Education, and Asian Societies, Cultures, & Languages
On-Campus Leadership: Italian Apprentice Teacher, Dartmouth Asian Organization
Asynchronous

Zhishan "Coco" Chu
Hometown: Shenzhen, China
Major/Minor: Biology and Romance Languages
On-Campus Leadership: Musical Empowerment Co-founder and President, Co-chair of Growing Change

Jennifer Costa
Hometown: Smithfield, RI
Major/Minor: Biology
On-Campus Leadership: Dartmouth Women’s Hockey, Minority Associated Pre-Health Students

Nancy Curtis
Hometown: Seattle, WA
Major/Minor: Psychology and Classical Studies
On-Campus Leadership: Student-Athlete Advisory Committee, Varsity Equestrian Team

William Dickerman
Hometown: Los Angeles, CA
Major/Minor: History
On-Campus Leadership: Dartmouth Outing Club, Management & Leadership Development Program

Janae Harris
Hometown: Riverton, Wyoming
Major/Minor: Government and Sociology
On-Campus Leadership: American Indian Science and Engineering Society, Native Americans at Dartmouth

Robert "Bobby" Hobart III
Hometown: San Francisco, CA
Major/Minor: History and Middle Eastern Studies
On-Campus Leadership: Model United Nations, Breivertones, Fraternity executive

Zachory Joynes
Hometown: Irmo, CA
Major/Minor: Government and Middle Eastern Studies
On-Campus Leadership: Government and Middle Eastern Studies research

Hi‘ilani Hopkins
Hometown: Kailua, HI
Major/Minor: Biology and Global Health
On-Campus Leadership: Management & Leadership Development Program, Sorority leadership

Caterina Hyneman
Hometown: Redondo Beach, CA
Major/Minor: Government, Computer Science, Hispanic Studies
On-Campus Leadership: Dartmouth Latinx Public Service Society, Coalition for Immigration Reform and Equality at Dartmouth

Janvi Kalra
Hometown: Shanghai and Singapore
Major/Minor: Computer Science and Philosophy
On-Campus Leadership: DALI Lab, Undergraduate adviser (UGA)
Abhimanyu Kapur  
Hometown: Mumbai, India  
Major/Minor: Computer Science, English, and Human-Centered Design  
On-Campus Leadership: Mental Health Union, Entrepreneurship LLC

Olivia Lovelace  
Hometown: Houston, TX  
Major/Minor: English  
On-Campus Leadership: Dartmouth Minority Pre-Law Association, Latinx Heritage Month Planning Committee

Jacob Maguire  
Hometown: Kingstown, RI  
Major/Minor: History, Spanish, and Government  
On-Campus Leadership: Dartmouth Democrats, Undergraduate Adviser (UGA)

Maryfer Mendoza  
Hometown: South Gate, CA  
Major/Minor: History, Government, and Latin American & Caribbean Studies  
On-Campus Leadership: Office of Pluralism and Leadership, America Reads

Allegra Carlotta Scarpa  
Hometown: Italy  
Major/Minor: Biology  
On-Campus Leadership: Dartmouth Entrepreneurial Network, Global Village

Ameena Rozzaque  
Hometown: San Antonio, TX  
Major/Minor: Middle Eastern Studies and Women’s Health  
On-Campus Leadership: Al-Nur, Undergraduate adviser (UGA), Stamps Scholar
Attendance

Summary

Attendance for the RLF Cohort of 2020-2021 is analyzed on both a session and an individual level. The session level analysis allows for observation of trends in attendance, to identify what times in the term have lower attendance than others, and to inspect overall attendance in the program. The Fellow level analysis identifies trends in the attendance of individual Fellows. The attendance data used only includes the 16 Fellows who participated in RLF synchronously throughout the entire program. Fellows who dropped out of the program or participated in the asynchronous cohort during any term are excluded from the analysis.

Overall, attendance was fairly high with a yearlong average of 90.6 percent fellows in attendance. A majority of sessions experienced high attendance: 14 out of 23 (61 percent) had attendance rates of 90 percent or greater. Attendance varied somewhat by trimester with the highest average attendance in the winter (95.2 percent) and the lowest average attendance in the spring (86 percent). In general, attendance was highest at the beginning and end of each term, dipping in the middle weeks.

Feedback and Suggestions

Feedback was sourced from Fellows through an online form and thirty-minute one-on-one exit interviews conducted by the RLF Program Student Assistants, Maria Smith-Lopez and Sarah Solomon. Completion of the form and participation in the exit interviews were voluntary. Not all Fellows provided feedback, although Fellows from both the synchronous and asynchronous cohorts did provide feedback.

Program

Fellows consistently stated that they held high expectations for the program. The expectations were often informed by conversations with upperclassmen that previously participated in the program. Other Fellows had their expectations informed by experiences with other Rockefeller Center programming in which they previously participated. The opportunity to bond with peers during senior year was frequently cited as a particularly strong motivation for Fellows to apply to the program this year. Even with the increased difficulty in fostering community because of the virtual and asynchronous format of the program, there was an overall high proportion of Fellows that gave the program a positive rating for meeting their expectations of the program. With the many challenges that faced the program staff and Student Assistants in reshaping RLF for a remote setting, meeting expectations was harder than typical. Meeting the expectations of a large majority of Fellows is an accomplishment and testament to the work done to transfer program outcomes across program format.
Overall, the program received high marks on its perceived value by Fellows after they completed the program. Speakers were highlighted as a strength of RLF, and the enjoyment of this aspect of programming was across the board, with three-quarters of Fellows selecting speakers as their favorite part of RLF. Fellow presentations and bonding activities were the next two most popular selections for Fellows’ favorite aspect of the program. The trivia event hosted by the Student Assistants was cited by some Fellows as particularly fun. In addition, the end of year in-person event was well liked by the Fellows that attended.

Although many Fellows found value and enjoyment in the program, there was a common sentiment that the online format negatively impacted their experience of the program. Much of this was based on Fellows’ expectations of the program based on talking to Fellows from previous years. The following are suggestions for improving RLF in areas that do not pertain to specific aspects of the program but rather more generally to the program. Some suggestions may only be applicable in a virtual RLF format, but others may be applicable no matter what format RLF is held in.

The most common critique of the program made by Fellows was the limited bonding that occurred in the remote format. In addition to offering more consistent bonding opportunities, one solution to this problem is to make it clear when marketing the program and introducing cohorts to the program, that bonding never happens automatically and requires work on the part of the Fellows, particularly in a remote format.

Another recommendation for the program is to provide more discussion opportunities. Providing time for Fellows to discuss the most recent session and how it relates to the previous sessions would be beneficial. More discussion would help Fellows realize deeper interest in session topics and generate stronger understanding of the topics, which in turn may lead to wider application of the lessons. This discussion time could be 15 minutes at the end of every session devoted to a handful of discussion questions, with an expectation that Fellows may stray off-topic. Importantly, these discussion groups should change no more than once a term, allowing the groups to become familiar with one another and develop group camaraderie. It would also work well to set the groups at the beginning of the year and keep them static through the program’s duration. It would be a natural extension for accountability groups to also serve as discussion groups. This addition to programming is easily applied to both a remote and in-person format, although the asynchronous delivery of the program cannot benefit from this change.

For the Asynchronous cohort, bonding events could be coordinated early in the program. These events early on would facilitate relationship building that would then enable the Fellows later in the program to organize their own events once they know each other better and remain more committed to the program.

Retreats

With the pandemic and associated restrictions in place, RLF had to forego the usual off-campus retreat for the fall. The Fall Retreat was held virtually over Friday evening and Saturday with four speaker-led
sessions. Although the speakers who led sessions at the retreat received positive feedback, the retreat was rated poorly overall by many Fellows due to the long hours on Zoom. With many Fellows hearing about the fall retreat from prior Fellows, expectations for the retreat were high; however, the remote format and the focus on content made it difficult for Fellows to remain engaged, especially at the end of the week and at times that interfered with meal times. The Winter Retreat received more positive feedback. It took place only on a Friday evening, and there was only one speaker-led session followed by a trivia activity.

Our recommendation is for retreats to be in-person with more opportunities for bonding and cohort building. If retreats must be virtual again, following the format of the Winter Retreat is acceptable, but the format of the Fall retreat should be avoided.

Logistics

Synchronous sessions were held on Zoom from 7:00 to 9:00 pm each Thursday evening. Using Zoom allowed Fellows and speakers to join from different parts of the country and to interact as a whole group and in smaller breakout rooms. However, many Fellows felt that two hours on a Zoom conferencing call was a draining experience that made it arduous to stay engaged, regardless of how interesting Fellows may have found the speaker, topic, or other activities. The difficulty of spending this time on Zoom was certainly exacerbated by the fact that most Fellows were taking classes or working remotely, drastically increasing their time on Zoom calls. Some Fellows also cited Thursday evening as a poor time for a weekly meeting. Because the sessions were at the end of the week, Zoom fatigue and general fatigue from a week of hard work exacerbated the difficulty of a two hour Zoom session for some Fellows. For other Fellows, the time conflicted with a number of other obligations.

A return to in-person sessions and in-person classes would alleviate the Zoom fatigue that many Fellows experiences. Other possible solutions include rescheduling RLF sessions for earlier in the week, which would require coordination with other programs hosted by the Rockefeller Center, and splitting the session into two, one-hour sessions. The Thursday session could be with the weekly speaker, while the second session on a different day could involve discussion and student presentations.

Speakers

Speakers were perhaps the most enjoyable part of RLF for a majority of Fellows. 75 percent of Fellows selected the speakers as their favorite part of the program, and no Fellows selected speakers as their least favorite part of the program. General comments about the speakers included a commendation for the diversity of speakers, the level of engagement incorporated into speakers’ activities, and the takeaways provided by a lot of the speakers. Favorite speakers were noted for making Fellows feel inspired, keeping the Fellows engaged during their presentations, and helping the Fellows feel excited about implementing the lessons shared.
A few recommendations were made by Fellows regarding speakers. One suggestion is to ensure that there are more varied lenses on what leadership is and means to better reflect the understanding of leadership that Fellows seemed to hold, as well as to better reflect the different identities represented by the Fellows. Second, topics should be extended to include more of a focus on handling challenges as a leader, particularly with authority figures. In addition, new topics requested are more skills and tips for post-collegiate life. The third and final suggestion was to ensure speakers avoid a lecture-structure for their time.

Student Presentations

In general, Fellows returned positive feedback about the student presentations. Learning about each person’s interests in leadership topics was noted as enjoyable and Fellows stated that they felt everyone did a great job with their presentations. In addition, Fellows stated that receiving the feedback from the other Fellows was helpful. Little negative feedback about the student presentations was received. An Asynchronous Fellow offered the suggestion of having Asynchronous Fellows do their presentations over a Zoom call, perhaps with their accountability group, so that the Asynchronous Fellows could receive feedback immediately and face-to-face, as the Synchronous Fellows did. Another suggestion was to extend the length of the presentations, since eight minutes was noted as being very brief for the amount of information requested. Considering the frequency with which Fellows ran over the allotted time during their presentations, this suggestion could be pursued, and Fellows provided with an additional two to four minutes of time for their presentations.

Accountability Groups

Accountability groups were a challenge in the virtual setting. Some Fellows mentioned that they bonded with their groups and felt more accountability for meeting RLF requirements; however, many asynchronous Fellows did not meet with their groups, and some synchronous Fellows felt that switching accountability groups after the fall term prevented meaningful bonding. Based on the feedback from Fellows, it is suggested that accountability groups are assigned prior to the program starting. An event could be coordinated allowing the groups to meet and become acquainted with one another so that Fellows can start the program with a few connections already established. These groups should not be changed, barring any changes in enrollment or motivating factors. This restructuring of accountability groups will enable stronger bonds to develop between Fellows and promote broader use of the accountability groups, in RLF and beyond.