



Advancing Knowledge, Together

Report for the UCL Friends & Alumni Association
Board



Trustees of the UCL Friends & Alumni Association (UCLFAA) Board

Thank you all for your continued support. Your commitment has been vital in strengthening the relationship between UCL and our alumni, friends, and supporters in the United States. Together, we have empowered talented American students to thrive at UCL, advanced pioneering research, and expanded the global reach of our institution.

2024 has been a remarkable year for us, filled with groundbreaking achievements and milestones that reflect the strength of our shared vision. Among our many accolades, [UCL celebrated two Nobel Prize winners](#): alumnus **Sir Demis Hassabis**, for his contributions to artificial intelligence, and **Professor Geoffrey E. Hinton**, founder of the **UCL Gatsby Computational Neuroscience Unit** leading advancements in the mathematical foundations of adaptive intelligent behaviour. They bring the total number of Nobel laureates from the UCL community to 32.

We also reached new heights in medical innovation, with spinout company [Trace Neuroscience securing \\$101 million](#) to develop motor neurone disease treatments, and our researchers making historic progress in the [understanding of Alzheimer's](#) disease. Recognised globally, UCL continued to hold its [ranking as the ninth-best](#) university in the world, and eleven members of staff and alumni were [honoured in the King's Birthday Honours](#) list.

Our connections to North America remain a cornerstone of our success. In March, [Vice Admiral Dr Vivek Murthy, US Surgeon General](#), inspired our students and community with a powerful address on social connection, while UCL's partnerships in the region, including the **Yale UCL Collaborative**, continued to thrive.

We are excited to share the inspirational stories behind the impact of this year's donations. Thanks to your support, we have made significant strides in advancing key areas, including global health, artificial intelligence, and public policy. Together, we are paving the way for a future defined by academic excellence, trailblazing research, and transformative opportunities.

Thank you for being an integral part of this journey.



Propelling Neurodegenerative Research with the Dolby Family Fund

The generous support of the **Dolby Family Fund** has been transformative for UCL's research into neurodegenerative diseases, enabling a dynamic and responsive approach to emerging opportunities. With flexible funding, we have been able to rapidly initiate and sustain critical projects without bureaucratic delays.

The results have had a profound impact, advancing global understanding of Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases while supporting the careers of several outstanding researchers, including Breakthrough Prize in Life Sciences winner, **Professor Sir John Hardy** - Chair of Molecular Biology of Neurological Disease at the UCL Institute of Neurology.

(above) Visitors to UCL partaking in community assistance, in aid of dementia
(below) Professor Sir John Hardy



Genetic Analysis of Dementia in Diverse Populations

One area of focus in 2024 has been the genetic analysis of dementia. The Dolby Family's support enabled the collection of DNA samples and cell lines from Nigerian populations, where researchers, in collaboration with **Dr. Njideka Okubadejo** based in University of Lagos, have identified key genetic distinctions in dementia profiles. Notably, the APOE4 risk allele, strongly associated with Alzheimer's in European populations, shows a much weaker association in Nigerian populations. This finding has prompted ongoing efforts to expand the dataset, incorporating both additional cases and controls as well as plasma samples. These will allow **UCL's Biomarker Lab** to determine whether the biomarker profiles of dementia differ significantly between African and European populations.



(above) Dr Dervis Salih

In addition, researchers are refining dementia clinical trial design by identifying the most effective clinical assessment scales to reduce variability in genetic analyses. This effort is critical to ensuring future studies and trials yield the clearest and most actionable data possible.

Integration of Genetic and Gene Expression Data

In a parallel line of research, the Dolby Family Fund has supported the integration of genetic risk data with gene expression data to uncover the cellular mechanisms underlying Alzheimer's disease. Co-led by **Dr Dervis Salih**, this research has revealed two distinct networks of Alzheimer's risk loci. These findings, supported by additional National Institutes of Health funding for collaborative work, are laying the groundwork for innovative therapeutic strategies targeting these molecular pathways.

Parkinson's Disease and the Role of the NSL Complex

The Non-Specific Lethal (NSL) complex is a master epigenetic regulator of genes and pathways linked to the disease. Co-led by **Dr Ben O'Callaghan** and **Professor Plun-Favreau**, our research is uncovering fundamental links between the NSL complex and Parkinson's risk loci. These findings open new avenues for the development of targeted treatments, offering hope to millions of patients worldwide.



(above) Professor Plun-Favreau

A Legacy of Support and Talent Development

The impact of the Dolby Family Fund extends beyond research findings to the development of talent. It has supported the work of Senior Research Fellow **Dr Maryam Shoai**, Data Analyst **Mr Shahryar Alavi**, and PhD student **Laura Caton**, among others. Their work, made possible by the family's generosity, exemplifies the intersection of innovation, collaboration, and impact that defines UCL's approach to tackling neurodegenerative diseases.

We are proud of the catalysed key advancements in understanding the genetic and cellular underpinnings of dementia and Parkinson's disease, particularly in diverse populations. Through fostering collaboration, advancing clinical and experimental approaches, and supporting talented researchers, your support has allowed us to consolidate our position as a global leader in neurodegenerative research.



(above) An IoA student studying archaeological specimens

Uncovering the Past: Supporting UCL Archaeology

Fieldwork is a cornerstone of UCL's Institute of Archaeology (IoA) degree programmes, offering students invaluable hands-on experience and skills development. Thanks to the generosity of an anonymous donor, the **Tessa Verney Wheeler Memorial Fieldwork Fund** provided two fully funded places for postgraduate students to participate in the 2024 IoA archaeological fieldwork school in Norton, Suffolk. This opportunity not only enriched the students' academic journey but also contributed to their future career prospects in the field of archaeology.

The fieldwork school, held from July 8 – 20 2024, took place on land adjacent to St. Andrew's Church in Norton, home to the remains of a Roman villa complex. Participants included MSc Bioarchaeological and Forensic Anthropology student **Jennifer Wilburn** and MA Archaeology and Heritage of Asia student **Zhuohan Yu**. Both scholars received comprehensive funding covering their travel from London, meals, and access to welfare facilities whilst on the fieldwork trip. The donor's support ensured that financial barriers did not prevent these talented students from engaging in this critical academic experience.

UCL's Institute of Archaeology is currently ranked 3rd in the world for its subject.

Founded in 1937, the Institute is one of the largest centres for archaeology, cultural heritage and museum studies in Britain.

It embodies UCL's commitment to academic rigor and experiential learning.

Skills for the Future

During the fieldwork school, Jennifer and Zhuohan acquired a range of essential excavation and survey skills, aligning with the standards outlined in the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists [Archaeology Skills Passport](#). These experiences provided them with a practical understanding of archaeological methods, strengthening their academic portfolios and preparing them for future roles in the discipline.

Both students shared detailed post-fieldwork reports with their donor, offering insights into their experiences and thanking them for the transformative opportunity. Their reflections highlight the vital role of philanthropy in advancing academic and professional training within archaeology, particularly for postgraduate students aiming to make meaningful contributions to the field.

Opportunities like this, made possible by philanthropic support, ensure that UCL students have access to unparalleled resources and training, empowering them to lead in the ever-evolving discipline of archaeology.



(above) UCL Provost Michael Spence outside the Portico on Main Campus

Driving Equity and Inclusion Through the Provost's Strategic Fund

The Provost's Strategic Fund has played a pivotal role in advancing UCL's vision of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) across its community. By supporting the **Race Equality Implementation Group** and other critical initiatives, the fund has empowered staff and students to lead innovative projects that create meaningful change. These projects underscore UCL's commitment to fostering justice, equality, and belonging, aligning with our [Strategic Plan](#) and our [Grand Challenges](#) programme.

Celebrating Diversity at UCL

This enriching project, conceived in the lead up to UCL's bicentennial celebrations, seeks to uncover and celebrate the diverse histories of the university's staff and students. By amplifying the stories of underrepresented individuals, **Celebrating Diversity at UCL** aims to create a deeper sense of belonging for marginalised communities. This initiative connects directly to UCL's ongoing research and engagement efforts, such as [Generation UCL: Two Hundred Years of Student Life in London](#), which reexamines the institution's founding and its early years.

By working collaboratively with key stakeholders - including Central EDI, UCL Culture, UCL Special Collections, and Students' Union UCL - the project is building an inclusive narrative which will inspire future generations. It also seeks to impact academic success and reduce the awarding gap by fostering an environment where all students feel seen, valued, and connected. The robust governance and ethical framework provided by **Generation UCL** ensures that this initiative will be impactful and enduring, further embedding diversity into UCL's identity as we approach our 200th anniversary.

Digital Access and Participation for International Students

Another notable initiative supported by the Race Equality Implementation Group addresses the unique challenges faced by international students, particularly those from racially marginalised backgrounds and non-English-speaking communities. Recognising that digital education is a foundation of academic success, this project explores the barriers these students encounter in accessing and navigating UCL's digital resources.

Through a participatory approach, students share their lived experiences to inform the development of tailored support systems. This collaboration is set to produce a **Digital Student Manifesto** - a declaration of UCL's commitment to ensuring equitable digital access for all. By addressing cultural, linguistic, and structural barriers, this initiative is paving the way for a more inclusive digital education experience that empowers students to achieve their full potential.



Transforming the Future Through Collaborative Impact

The Provost's Fund exemplifies how philanthropy can transform ambitions into reality. With projects like these, UCL is advancing its broader Grand Challenges themes: **Justice and Equality**, **Cultural Understanding**, and **Mental Health and Wellbeing**, while laying the groundwork for upcoming themes on **Inequalities** and **Intercultural Communication**.

We are thankful to the UCLFAA for helping reaffirm UCL's position as a global leader in addressing pressing societal challenges, and for strengthening our efforts in building a more inclusive academic community.

UCLFAA Scholarships

Six students are beneficiaries of UCLFAA scholarships in 2024.

We are pleased to share the names of the latest joiners to the UCLFAA scholar community.

UCLFAA MSc Machine Learning Scholarship:

Lily Nguyen

Trevor Bluth

UCLFAA Institute of Innovation & Public Purpose (IIPP) MPA Scholarship:

Christopher Rosselot

Buhm Enkhbaatar

Fer-Garb Scholarship:

Millie Coster

Jedikaya Elphick

On the following pages, you can learn more about some scholars and the impact that their awards have had. With your support, we are able to extend the experience of a world-class education to more students than ever, and we look forward to continuing to do so.

Lily Nguyen



A shining example of determination and ambition, Lily hails from White Plains, New York, and is a first-generation college student of Vietnamese immigrants. She pursued Applied Mathematics with a focus on Economics and Computer Science, alongside a citation in Chinese at Harvard College, prior to her studies at UCL. Driven by a vision for a better future, she aspires to make a meaningful impact in the AI space, focusing on education and climate initiatives.

Dear UCL Friends & Alumni Association,

Through your generosity, I have had the incredible opportunity to broaden my worldview while participating in this master's program. I originally chose to pursue this degree in order to sharpen my technical expertise in data science and machine learning, with the goal of working on education equity projects. This program has not only deepened my technical knowledge but has also broadened my understanding of the numerous pathways available to achieve this goal. I've gained insight not only into various methodologies but also into the wide array of collaborative opportunities that can bring about meaningful change.

Outside the classroom, I have engaged in profound discussions and collaborative projects with my classmates, whose diverse perspectives have sparked new ideas and ignited my curiosity. I already feel I have grown immensely, both in academic knowledge and in my sense of purpose.

The lectures and interactions with my professors and classmates have been inspiring. One class I have especially enjoyed is AI in Sustainability. The guest lectures have expanded my perspective on the many ways AI and machine learning can positively impact the world, and the breadth of applications is amazing.

I am deeply grateful for your support that has made it possible for me to continue on my journey at UCL. I look forward to applying all I've learned and using this foundation to contribute toward education equity and positive social impact. Thank you for believing in me and for enabling me to reach toward my dreams.

Yours sincerely,



Lily

"I already feel I have grown immensely, both in academic knowledge and in my sense of purpose."

Trevor Bluth

Trevor grew up in Concord, California, and exemplifies curiosity and drive. He completed his undergraduate studies in Mathematics and Economics at Boston University before taking a gap year to work as a data analyst for a Massachusetts-based bank. Now pursuing a Masters degree at UCL, he is eager to apply data science methods and machine learning algorithms to finance, building on his professional experience.



Dear UCL Friends and Alumni Association,

I am writing to express my sincere thanks for being selected as the recipient of the Machine Learning scholarship at UCL. Your support has made it possible for me to pursue my MSc in Computational Statistics and Machine Learning, and I am incredibly grateful for this opportunity. It has always been my dream to study here at UCL and this past month has been amazing and has surpassed my expectations already, both academically and personally.

It has only been a month so far, but I feel like I have already grown so much in terms of my intuition and knowledge of machine learning algorithms. My modules are not only challenging but also rewarding, as I see the mathematical foundations I first fell in love with during my time at Boston University come to life in new and powerful ways. In particular, my favourite module so far has been Probabilistic and Unsupervised Learning, taught by Dr. Peter Orbanz. I've also been pleasantly surprised by the close-knit community among the three MSc programs in Machine Learning. It's been incredibly rewarding to feel such a strong sense of support from my fellow students and faculty. The welcoming atmosphere at UCL has made it easy to settle in, and I truly appreciate how collaborative and encouraging everyone has been.

On a personal level, moving 5,000 miles from home still feels surreal, but it has pushed me to step outside my comfort zone and make the most of my time here in London. I've had the chance to meet people from all over the world, which has been an invaluable experience. UCL offers so many opportunities, and I'm doing my best to take advantage of them. Swimming has been a passion of mine since I was little, so I joined the UCL Swim Club which has been the perfect way to stay active, meet new people, and balance my studies with something else I truly enjoy.

Looking ahead, I am confident that the challenging curriculum and world-class professors at UCL will set me up well for a successful career in data science. Building on the professional experience I gained during my gap year, I am particularly interested in applying data science methods and machine learning algorithms to different areas of finance. To support this, I am currently taking a module on Stochastic Methods in Finance. Next term, I am excited to have received special permission from the program director to take Algorithmic Trading, which explores how machine learning models can be applied specifically in financial markets.

This scholarship has alleviated much of the financial stress of studying here and has allowed me to fully immerse myself in all that my program and UCL have to offer. It's motivated me to push myself even further, and I am more determined than ever to make the most of my time here at UCL. Once again, thank you for your generosity and belief in my potential. Your support means the world to me, and I am truly grateful for the incredible opportunity it has provided.

With many thanks,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Trevor', with a stylized, cursive script.

Trevor

" ...moving 5,000 miles from home still feels surreal. It has pushed me to step outside my comfort zone and make the most of my time here in London. "

Christopher Rooselot



A proud Georgian, Christopher from Decatur, graduated from the University of Georgia with dual degrees in International Affairs and Latin American Studies. He then took his talents abroad to Quito, Ecuador, where he served as a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant at Universidad Central del Ecuador before studying at UCL. With a passion for innovation, he aspires to manage local governments and transform service delivery.

Dear UCL Friends & Alumni Association,

This is Christopher, the recipient of the UCLFAA IIPP MPA Scholarship for 2024-2025. I am enormously grateful for this scholarship, and two simple words are probably the most fitting: thank you. This note comes six weeks in to my time in the IIPP MPA (which - difficult for me to believe - is already over a sixth of my time at UCL), and I have been challenged, motivated, and inspired exactly as I had hoped.

I applied to the IIPP MPA because of two general notions: 1) a belief that local government administration is where I can do good (cliché but true), and 2) amid complex challenges, local government will need new collaborative toolkits. As an undergraduate at the University of Georgia, I studied International Relations but found myself drawn to local-level collaboration between government, nonprofit, businesses, and others. Yes, these were often inefficient and imperfect coordination systems, but they brought a community together and were, perhaps, reflective of the innovative processes needed at the local level. For fun, I enrolled in MPA classes in my senior year where I began to examine these questions of collaboration, as well as ones around innovation that come from employees within local government.

Then, I took a detour. I taught English for a year at Ecuador's largest public university on a Fulbright Scholarship. I loved teaching - but those questions of localized innovation continued to stick with me (to the point that I tried my hand at an internship with one of Quito's city councilpersons). When I found the IIPP webpage in December of last year, the lightbulb clicked - UCL was where I needed to be.

So the challenge, motivation, and inspiration I mentioned earlier? Constants at IIPP every day. Each lecture brings a new spark: how can systems thinking alter where local government intervenes? How can local governments structure employee innovation teams and diffuse knowledge across the organization? These crucial concepts - and many others - are ones I would not engage with in other MPA programs.

Through module assignments, I am already diving into city-sponsored open innovation challenges and the U.S. homelessness response system. Applied learning is truly one of the most beneficial parts of IIPP (clearly, I am excited for the placement). And the second biggest plus so far? Learning from peers from countries as

diverse as Colombia, Mongolia, Malaysia, Canada, Argentina, and many others. I am still figuring out the exact role (and cities) where I will best be able to explore these questions - but my classmates are a constant source of inspiration.

Thank you, again, for giving me the opportunity to study at UCL and in IIPP. I hope we can stay in touch.

Yours sincerely,

Christopher Barrett

Christopher

" Each lecture brings a new spark: how can systems thinking alter where local government intervenes? "



Buhm Enkhbaatar

Having worked as a host and news anchor for Mongolia's first English television channel, Buhm's charisma and confidence led her to co-found an educational tech startup. Prior to travelling to London for her studies at UCL, she also worked in the Cabinet Office of her native country, Mongolia. Her primary interests lie in policy innovation and experimentation.

Millie Coster



Millie from Watford, just northwest of London, discovered her enthusiasm for art through her undergraduate studies in History of Art at the University of Warwick, despite having no formal background in the subject. She broadened her horizons through study abroad experiences in Venice and Barcelona, and plans to seek further global opportunities here at UCL. Inspired by museums, archives, and film festivals, she aims to build a career in the arts.

Dear UCL Friends & Alumni Association,

My name is Millie, and I am in my first year of the part-time History of Art MA at UCL. I would like to thank you for the scholarship that you have provided, and to let you know a little about how it has impacted my life.

After completing my History of Art BA at the University of Warwick, I questioned how I would be able to continue my academic journey. I found myself living with strangers in an unfamiliar city, working two jobs, and constantly questioning how I would be able to afford to change my situation. Finding out that the Fer-Garb Scholarship existed gave me some much-needed optimism that people like myself can have a place in art history academia, and actually being awarded it has completely transformed my situation.

The scholarship has allowed me to move to London, live amongst friends, continue my education, find work at a bookshop, and make the most of the cultural opportunities here. Despite growing up close to London, I have explored the city more in the last two months than ever before. I can frequently attend plays, research seminars, and arts events that simply were not available to me before moving to London. My favourite weekly excursion has been making use of the BFI Southbank cinema's £3 under-25s tickets. Being able to stroll into an exhibition after a morning seminar provides a sense of immersion that has been invaluable to my studies and a sense of connection to the arts. As I continue to find my community within London and UCL, I am consistently grateful that someone like yourself has made it physically possible for me to be here.

Since undergraduate level, I have been interested in video art and documentary film, particularly from Central and Eastern Europe, as the radical geopolitical changes within this area coincided with similarly radical changes in the availability and capabilities of video technologies. I feel that academic discourse on the aesthetic capabilities of the digital image is a growing area of interest for art historians, and being part of this emerging field excites me. A module at UCL which is allowing me to develop this interest is *Toil and Trouble: Feminism in Art Now*, which has a focus on art from 2008-onwards. A highlight so far has been our field trip to The Women's Art Library at Goldsmiths. For the first time, I was able to physically handle archive materials, and the curator who hosted our seminar even allowed us to take home some original 1990s copies of the organisation's former publication *MAKE Magazine*.

Experiences like this visit have motivated me to consider how I might seek career experience in archives, particularly in relation to the growing role of digitalisation, video, and the internet.

An important privilege that this scholarship has offered me is time. Alongside exploring the city and taking time with my readings and assignments, I am able to properly reflect on how I can take my studies and passions further. For example, next term I am beginning language classes at UCL, and I have also started looking into what study abroad opportunities might be available for next Summer.

Whilst in the past I have often felt intimidated by traditional art history academia and institutions, the diverse breadth of opinion that the MA covers as well as the scholarship that you offer has been a great reminder that someone like myself does have a place within the discipline. I know that if my future position allows me to, I will find ways to give back, supporting people who have a passion for art history but not the financial means to further themselves in it. The kindness of your offer has had a great impact on my life, and I would like to thank you again for investing in my education and wellbeing.

With many thanks,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. Coster". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Millie

" As I continue to find my community within London and UCL, I am consistently grateful that someone like yourself has made it physically possible for me to be here."

Jedikaya Elphick

Jedikaya, originally from Eastbourne and now based in London, is deeply passionate about art and academia. He earned his Bachelor's degree in History of Art here at UCL, where he explored the complexities of authorship in modern and contemporary artistic practices. Upon completing his Master's of Art in History of Art, he aspires to begin his PhD journey and is researching programmes both in London and internationally.



Dear UCL Friends & Alumni Association,

I am writing this letter to express my deepest gratitude for the support you have provided me through the Fer-Garb Scholarship. As the recipient of your generous aid, I have been able to take up my offer at UCL and embark on the next stage of my academic journey, to deepen my engagement with art and its discourses and pursue my ambitions without restraint.

Since graduating from UCL with a first-class honours history of art degree in 2020, I worked in a number of contemporary art galleries but quickly realised that my true passion lay in a more academic engagement with art. My family's precarious financial situation, in addition to me being a first-generation student, however, made the pursuit of postgraduate study an incredibly daunting prospect.

Thanks to your support, I have been able to throw myself head-on into my studies, pursuing avenues of thought that I might not otherwise have had the chance to explore and using my time to read widely around each of my special subjects. I am currently in the process of writing my first essay on the critical debate surrounding the 1984 "Primitivism' in 20th Century Art" exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, in particular the aestheticisation of 'tribal' objects and its art-historical and political ramifications, which I'm greatly enjoying.


I am finding the content of the course extremely interesting, and I am particularly enjoying Richard Taws' "Art and Technology in 19th century France" module, which covers everything from revolutionary pamphlets and Diderot's Encyclopédie to panoramas and phantasmagoria shows. As someone primarily interested in the history of modernism, it has been fascinating to engage with the cultural output of a much earlier period, to trace the origins of modernity and start making thematic connections across time and geographical boundaries.

It has also been exciting to rejoin such an active research community, to attend extra-curricular talks and events given by leading academics in the field and to work closely with my fellow students. I have found the small seminar group format of many of my classes to be an enriching and productive environment, helping me to refine and develop my ideas whilst encountering new perspectives that I might not have considered before. I feel incredibly privileged to have this opportunity to engage in meaningful critical discussions on an

almost daily basis, to undertake close readings of objects and texts and to work closely with leading scholars.

Upon completing my MA, I am planning on applying for PhD study. Your support has not only provided me with the means to pursue further study without constraint but has also been deeply affirming in terms of my career ambitions and potential to make meaningful contributions to the field. I would like to thank you again for this life-changing opportunity and for supporting me in my academic journey.

Yours sincerely,



Jedikaya

" I feel incredibly privileged to have this opportunity to engage in meaningful critical discussions on an almost daily basis. "

As we reflect on another year of remarkable achievements, we are profoundly grateful for our enduring partnership with the UCLFAA. As we gear up to celebrate UCL's bicentennial in 2026, our milestones serve as inspiration of what we have and can reach together. The wide-ranging achievements highlighted in this report are a testament to the impact of your collective contributions.

We look forward to continuing this journey with you, and all of our stateside alumni, friends and supporters, in celebration and in hope of shaping a brighter future for those to come. Thank you.

For more information, please contact:

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