



Advancing Knowledge, Together

Report for the UCL Friends & Alumni Association
Board



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

On behalf of UCL, we are grateful to the UCL Friends and Alumni Association for your continued engagement and support. Your partnership plays an important role in strengthening UCL's connection with alumni and supporters across the United States, and in enabling research and scholarship that contributes to public benefit on a global scale.

This year, UCL's work has continued to demonstrate the value of global research partnerships and public engagement, with a particular emphasis on research that speaks directly to contemporary societal challenges. In January, the Prime Minister, **Sir Keir Starmer**, [set out a new plan for artificial intelligence](#) in a major speech hosted at UCL East, underscoring UCL's role as a convenor for national and international debate on emerging technologies.

UCL also sustained its strong global standing, [remaining ninth in the 2026 QS World University Rankings](#) and continuing to be recognised for the strength of its international research networks. During the year, UCL researchers published influential work [examining patterns of segregation and inequality across U.S. cities](#), [cultural shifts in reading and leisure](#) in American daily life, and the [health impacts of air pollution from oil and gas production](#) across the United States—research that combines methodological innovation with clear public relevance.

Together, these activities reflect values that have shaped UCL from the outset: openness, global engagement, and a commitment to knowledge in service of society.

Against this backdrop, the support of the UCLFAA has helped advance a diverse portfolio of research and engagement activity addressing complex global challenges. During the year, this included contributing to international dialogue on racism and child health through a specialist workshop at the second **World Congress on Migration, Ethnicity, Race & Health**; advancing archaeological research in the eastern Mediterranean that deepens understanding of long-term human settlement and landscape use; and continuing to support the **safeguarding of Asmara's UNESCO World Heritage Site** through conservation, skills development, and public engagement.

The UCLFAA's support has also facilitated the launch of a high-profile speaker series examining **democracy and constitutionalism in the United States**, alongside significant **progress in Huntington's disease** research following positive results from a global gene therapy trial led by UCL scientists.



Modernist Heritage, Conservation, and Urban Futures

The Asmara Heritage Project (AHP), established in 2014, is responsible for managing and safeguarding Asmara, Eritrea's first and only [UNESCO World Heritage Site](#) and Africa's only modernist World Heritage Site. Its work focuses not only on the protection of a unique architectural landscape, but also on approaches that strengthen local capacity and support sustainable urban development.

In early 2025, activity delivered in collaboration with UCL's **MA Architecture and Historic Urban Environments (MAHUE)** built on a long-standing partnership supporting research, practice, and public engagement around Asmara's heritage. The work prioritised co-designed outputs intended to be usable by local partners over time, rather than one-off interventions—an approach aligned with the AHP's priorities and longer-term management planning.

A central outcome was the co-fabrication of a large-scale physical model of Asmara, designed to be completed iteratively by Eritrean students and young professionals and to function as a practical tool for engagement and planning. Alongside this, UCL staff and students supported the use of **3D scanning and photogrammetry** to document priority buildings and streetscapes, producing digital outputs that can inform future conservation and rehabilitation activity.

Public engagement also formed a key component of the work, enabling the structured collection of local perspectives on significant heritage sites and future use. This approach is valuable not because it seeks to prescribe outcomes, but because it strengthens the evidence base for decision-making and helps identify where further public awareness and consultation may be needed.

The UCLFAA's sustained support has enabled the **Asmara Heritage Project** to improve conservation practice, build local capacity, and advance internationally recognised approaches to protecting modernist heritage. This work underscores UCL's long-standing leadership in heritage research that connects architectural preservation with sustainable urban development.

Democratic Constitutionalism in a Changing United States

The [Global Centre for Democratic Constitutionalism](#) (GCDC), established in 2024 and housed within UCL Laws, is focused on advancing knowledge of democratic governance, the rule of law, and constitutional resilience through research and a programme of convening activities.

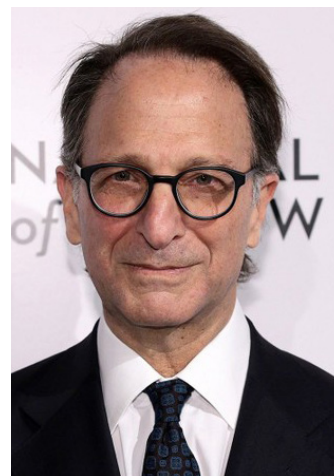
In late 2025, philanthropic support helped the GCDC launch a high-profile speaker series, **The State of the United States**, bringing prominent U.S. legal and public figures into discussion about democracy and constitutionalism in the current political era. The inaugural event, held on 8 October 2025, attracted an in-person audience of over 200, with the [published video](#) viewed more than 230,000 times, extending the reach of the conversation well beyond the lecture theatre.

The opening discussion—featuring former **U.S. Department of Justice Special Counsel Jack Smith** in conversation with **Professor Andrew Weissmann**—modelled the Centre’s approach: rigorous public engagement informed by constitutional scholarship and accessible to a wider civic audience. The event generated significant external attention, reflecting both the public importance of these questions and UCL’s role as a forum for credible, research-led debate. The series’ next event in March 2026 will see **Dr Coleen Shogan**, former Archivist of the United States, in conversation with **Richard Ovenden OBE**.

Through the generosity of the UCLFAA, the Global Centre for Democratic Constitutionalism is helping UCL bring leading American legal perspectives into sustained conversation on constitutional governance. In doing so, our position as a trusted transatlantic partner in examining the resilience of democratic institutions and the rule of law remains fortified.



(above) Jack Smith



(above) Professor Andrew Weissman



Progressing Treatments for Neurodegenerative Disease

Huntington's disease is a fatal neurodegenerative condition caused by a single genetic mutation, with profound impacts on movement, cognition, and behaviour. Despite decades of research following the identification of the gene in 1993, effective treatments to slow disease progression have remained limited — making recent advances particularly significant for patients and families.

In September 2025, UCL scientists and trial sponsor uniQure announced **positive results** from a global clinical trial of the gene therapy **AMT-130**. The research team reported that patients receiving the treatment [experienced 75% less disease progression overall](#) compared to a matched cohort not receiving the therapy — marking the **first time** a drug trial has reported continuing, statistically significant slowing of Huntington's progression.

Alongside these results, **Professor Sarah Tabrizi** and colleagues continue to advance a broader pipeline of therapeutic approaches, including trials exploring distinct mechanisms such as ribonucleic acid (RNA) interference and small-molecule therapies. The team is also progressing work focused on individuals who carry the gene but do not yet have symptoms, with the long-term aim of assessing whether onset can be prevented or significantly delayed.

This work highlights the importance of flexible philanthropic support in enabling research teams to sustain momentum, pursue promising avenues, and respond to emerging opportunities in a fast-moving clinical landscape. Such support reinforces UCL's position at the forefront of global efforts to develop effective treatments for neurodegenerative disease.



(above) Professor Sarah Tabrizi



UCLFAA Scholarships

Four students are beneficiaries of UCLFAA scholarships in 2025.

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

UCLFAA MSc Machine Learning Scholarship

Jerry Moncus

Niall Dalton

UCLFAA MSc in Dementia Scholarship

Emma Lawless

UCLFAA MSc Environment and Sustainable Development Scholarship

Maile Harris

On the following pages, you can learn more about the 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.

Jerry (J.J.) Moncus

Dear UCL Friends & Alumni Association,

It is lovely to meet you from across the page! My name is J.J., and I am currently studying the **MSc in Machine Learning** at UCL.

I am originally from Dalton, Georgia, where I spent most of my childhood in between sports and music before going off to Duke University to complete my bachelor's degree in mathematics. It was there that I fell in love with social science research so I embarked on a career in survey work in D.C.

I had been familiar with machine learning and artificial intelligence since I was first introduced in my undergraduate coursework, but it was not until the public reckoning of generative AI and agentic systems, which left me equally as excited as fearful, that I felt like I had found my calling. These technologies will certainly have existential consequences for humanity, for better or worse, and I would like to do my part to make the AI ecosystem safer and more reliable.

The path forward required a graduate degree, and after some tough conversations with my family, it was clear that the only available path to graduate school given our financial circumstances was two-fold:

1) it would need to be a one-year master's programme, so I can get back into the labour market as quickly as possible, and 2) I would need a scholarship to be able to afford to go. Luckily, the UCLFAA Scholarship was a perfect fit, and by your generosity, I have been granted an opportunity to make my dream a reality. For this, I cannot thank you enough.

"These technologies will certainly have existential consequences for humanity... and I would like to do my part to make the AI ecosystem safer and more reliable."

I am thoroughly enjoying my time at UCL so far and trying to take full advantage of the opportunities campus life offers. My term one courses are all rigorous mathematical introductions to machine learning, which has been both challenging and fulfilling. I have specifically loved my Bayesian Deep Learning class, where we are learning a lot about quantifying uncertainty, and I plan to apply this to the design of generative tools in my future career.

I have also joined the Explore programme through UCL's in-house entrepreneurship hub, BaseKX, where I am learning the fundamentals of starting my own business. After I graduate, my goal is to leverage my machine learning expertise to found a tech startup that specifically supports social scientists.

Beyond academics, I have made countless friends from across the world and all walks of life, which I am confident will last well beyond our UCL tenure.

In some sense, I feel like a kid again: wide-eyed and enthusiastic for a future that I get to build for myself. You have given me the privilege to be optimistic, to envision a life path that was not previously possible, and to see it through. This is a life-changing opportunity for me and my family, and I will be forever grateful to you for this chance.

Yours sincerely,



J.J. Moncus

Niall Dalton

Dear UCL Friends & Alumni Association,

Thank you very much for your generous support. As a recipient of the UCLFAA Scholarship for the **MSc in Machine Learning**, I am deeply grateful. Your support has already shaped my experience at UCL, and I have been working hard to make the most of this opportunity both academically and personally.

Before coming to UCL, I spent several years working as a software engineer, first in more traditional software roles and later at an AI startup. Earlier in my career, I contributed to systems used in high-stakes environments, including surgical assistance tools and satellite flight software. Those experiences made it very clear to me that the most impactful AI systems are not just powerful, but also understandable, reliable, and safe. Over time, I realised that to contribute meaningfully to this kind of work, I needed a deeper theoretical foundation; hence my decision to return to academia and pursue this master's degree.

UCL's Machine Learning programme, and London more broadly, have been exactly the kind of environment I was hoping for. Being in a global city with such a strong research and technology ecosystem has been invaluable. I am surrounded by classmates and faculty who bring diverse perspectives and high expectations, which pushes me to refine my thinking and raise my own standards. The scholarship has been a crucial enabler of this experience, allowing me to engage fully with the programme rather than splitting my attention between study and financial pressures.

Academically, I have particularly enjoyed the Unsupervised and Probabilistic Learning module run by the Gatsby Institute. The course approaches the material with a level of rigour that I appreciate, while still being grounded and intuitive. It has strengthened my understanding of probabilistic modelling and

strengthened my understanding of probabilistic modelling and representation learning, which are areas that are essential for building AI systems we can interpret and trust. Other modules have complemented this by exposing me to a broad range of methods and applications, helping me connect the theoretical tools with real-world use cases.

Beyond coursework, I have taken on the role of student representative for my cohort. In this capacity, I gather feedback from students, communicate their concerns and suggestions to faculty, and help ensure that the programme continues to improve. This role has pushed me to develop clearer communication skills, empathy, and a more structured approach to problem-solving in a community setting. These are skills I expect will be just as important in research and industry leadership as any technical expertise.

"Your investment has given me the freedom to focus on learning, research, and community involvement at a pivotal moment in my career."

Looking ahead, I am eager to deepen my involvement in research. I am currently working part-time with a professor on a project related to AI alignment, and I hope to expand this into more substantial research in the second term, ideally aiming towards a publication. My long-term ambition is to help build AI systems that are not only effective, but transparent and trustworthy. I also hope to support the broader UCL community by collaborating with peers, sharing industry experience and, over time, mentoring students.

On a personal note, studying in London has also been a rewarding experience outside the classroom. I have enjoyed seeing plays, visiting museums, and exploring different parts of the city. These experiences, while less formal than coursework or research, contribute to a well-rounded life here and make this period of study feel all the more meaningful.

None of this would have been possible in the same way without the financial support of the UCL Friends & Alumni Association. Your investment has given me the freedom to focus on learning, research, and community involvement at a pivotal moment in my career. Thank you again for your generosity and for your confidence in my potential. I am determined to make good use of this opportunity and to pay it forward in the future.

Yours sincerely,

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

Niall Dalton

Emma Lawless

Dear UCL Friends & Alumni Association,

I am writing to express my deepest gratitude for being awarded the UCLFAA Scholarship for **MSc Dementia**. It is a tremendous honour to be recognised by such a distinguished organisation, and I am sincerely thankful for the support you have extended toward my academic and professional journey. Your generosity has not only eased the financial burden of pursuing graduate education, but has also strengthened my commitment to contributing meaningfully to the field of dementia care.

Pursuing a Master's in Dementia at UCL is an opportunity that holds great personal and professional significance for me. Dementia affects millions of individuals and families across the world, often in ways that are deeply challenging and emotionally complex. My passion for this field stems from both academic interest and lived experiences, and I have long aspired to gain advanced knowledge that will allow me to make a greater impact on the lives of those affected. This scholarship brings me one step closer to that aspiration by giving me the chance to focus more fully on my studies and research without the added pressure of financial strain.

Your generous support has already had a meaningful impact on my confidence and motivation as I begin this next chapter. Knowing that an organisation rooted in the UCL community believes in my potential inspires me to strive for excellence in every aspect of my academic work. I am particularly excited about the opportunity to learn from leading researchers, engage with innovative approaches to dementia care, and collaborate with peers who share the same passion for improving the quality of life for individuals living with cognitive decline.

Beyond financial assistance, this scholarship represents encouragement that carries immense weight as I progress through the programme. I am committed to using the knowledge and skills I gain at UCL to contribute to improved care frameworks, more compassionate support systems, and research that brings us closer to effective prevention and treatment strategies. It is my hope that in the future, I will be able to give back to the UCL community and support students in the same way you have supported me.

Once again, thank you for this remarkable opportunity. I am truly grateful for your investment in my future and for the meaningful difference you are making in my academic journey. Please accept my heartfelt appreciation for your generosity, your confidence in my potential, and your dedication to supporting students who are committed to making a positive impact in the world.

Yours sincerely,



Emma Lawless

Maile Harris

Dear UCL Friends & Alumni Association,

I would like to express my immense gratitude for being selected as the first fully funded recipient of the UCLFAA Scholarship for the **MSc in Environment and Sustainable Development (ESD)**. This is an amazing honour to hold, and I am so incredibly grateful for the trust the association put in me as well as the opportunity for impact.

My academic journey at UCL has continued to challenge me and my perceptions of the world. The ESD program has been a fulfilling continuation of my commitments to change and furthering my education. I have thoroughly enjoyed learning in all my courses this term and it has opened me up to more knowledge and experiences than I could have ever hoped for. Learning from the Development Planning Unit (DPU) has allowed me to explore everything from a unique and expert perspective that I would not be able to anywhere else.

Receiving this scholarship has helped to remove a significant financial barrier that would have made pursuing my dream of international graduate study extremely challenging. This award allows me to fully dedicate myself to my studies and ensures that I can pursue whatever future I decide on. Whether that be working for community-based organisations or non-profits; I know I will not be limited. Your gracious support makes it possible for me to choose impact over income.

I am so very deeply honoured to represent the values of the UCLFAA and the DPU. Thank you for investing in students committed to advancing equity and contributing to more just and sustainable futures. I look forward to carrying this trust with me throughout my time at UCL and into my future work.

With many thanks,



Maile Harris

Over 1,300 North American students study at UCL each year, contributing to a vibrant international community, and our alumni network of more than 25,600 across the United States and Canada continues to champion UCL's mission on a global stage.

As we approach our bicentenary in 2026, the launch of UCL200 offers an opportunity to reflect on the importance of long-standing partnerships—particularly with our North American alumni and friends—in shaping UCL's history and supporting its future direction.

Thank you again for your continued partnership and support. Your generosity enables UCL to sustain work that is rigorous, globally engaged, and responsive to real-world challenges, while investing in the people and collaborations that will shape its impact in the years ahead.

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