N.C. State University’s Caldwell Fellows Program

40 Years of CCL Impact
In 1972, the Smith Richardson Foundation had a vision:

“Provide leadership development training to college students to maximize their impact as new professionals when they enter the workforce.”

Having just provided the seed money for the Center for Creative Leadership in Greensboro in 1970, the Foundation funded, for the first five years, programs at five colleges and universities. The goal was to provide college students opportunities for the same rigorous leadership development and education typically available only to working professionals. By teaching promising college students leadership skills before they entered the workforce, the Foundation hoped to create waves of young professionals who would lead in their companies, communities and, ultimately, the world.
It was an ambitious vision of leadership training, especially in the early 1970s, and especially when focused on college students.

At N.C. State University, that program became what is now known as the Caldwell Fellows; it is one of just two of the original five university programs that continue to this day. (The other is the N.C. Fellows program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Duke University has since created a similar program.)

The Caldwell Fellows embraced not only the Richardson Foundation’s vision of educating young leaders, but also legendary N.C. State Chancellor John T. Caldwell’s view that the university should educate students to be successful professionals, as well as servant-leaders who make the world a better place.

For 40 years, CCL’s philosophy and training has been a vital component of the program. A CCL associate is involved in selecting Caldwell Fellows during their freshman year, and CCL runs an intensive, three-day training program during students’ junior or senior year as a capstone experience.

Delivering Intensive Leadership Development

Students apply to the Caldwell Fellows program after their first semester in college, ensuring that Fellows have proven they can handle the academic rigors of college. The selection process is intensive, including three essays and multiple interviews for a group of about 50 finalists. The goal is not necessarily to choose the students who always win the top scholarships, but those “diamonds in the rough,” says Bill Sternbergh, a CCL senior fellow for leadership education who has taught Caldwell Fellows since the program’s inception and is involved in selecting Fellows. “There’s a glow, there’s a spark about wanting to have an impact on the world,” he says. It’s not uncommon for at least a few of the 25 Fellows selected each year to be the first in their families to go to college. Some of them come from rural North Carolina, others from overseas.
Caldwell Fellows receive an academic scholarship, leadership and service opportunities, and an annual experiential learning stipend. The stipend requires students to write a proposal before using the money; often it goes to service-learning projects.

After three or four years in the program, students go to the Greensboro CCL campus to spend three days in an intensive, hands-on leadership development program. It includes various assessments, such as a Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and a 360 assessment, before the program. On the CCL campus, they get an outdoor leadership training experience. Then they go through an experiential challenge in which they respond to a hypothetical situation and are videotaped.

The situation is not typically a college scenario but something the Fellows are more likely to encounter once they’ve graduated. They must consider the various legal, ethical, economic, and other dimensions of the experiential challenge.

Watching themselves on tape afterward can be very revealing to students, who may learn new things about the way they come across to others. Such insights can lead to changes in behavior and make Fellows more aware of the leadership skills that can enable them to make a greater impact in their professional lives.

The three days are capped with a one-on-one personal coaching session that typically runs from 90 minutes to two hours. The students receive feedback based on their assessments and leadership training. Fellows discuss with their coaches what the feedback and personal insights mean, and how they might apply them as students and future professionals.
“We also had a major scope change, so I had to get everyone realigned with the changes,” she says. “Being a ‘servant-first’ (leader) helped me be more successful in my role, even though this was the first time that I had this type of leadership opportunity.”
For some graduates, the CCL program not only gave them leadership skills, it reshaped their careers. Kyle Rehder earned a chemical engineering degree, but his experience in the program led him to reassess his career goals.

“My time at CCL certainly helped me define my future career path in academic medicine,” says Rehder, now a pediatric critical care physician at Duke University. “While I enjoyed many aspects of chemical engineering, the self-evaluation exercises at CCL were able to help me define some of the criteria that would be important for my own future career satisfaction, namely: personal interaction, teaching opportunities, and advocacy.”
Rehder says he taps his CCL experiences daily, often in life-and-death circumstances.

“The flexibility of leadership styles is what I value most—the recognition of the correct times to lead by example, to delegate, to support others, or to step forward and take charge,” he says. “Whether it be teaching, leading the resuscitation of a critically ill child, breaking bad news to a family, managing a group of highly skilled (but stressed) physicians, or developing hospital patient safety initiatives, these skills are used every day.”
The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL®) is a top-ranked, global provider of leadership development. By leveraging the power of leadership to drive results that matter most to clients, CCL transforms individual leaders, teams, organizations, and society. Our array of cutting-edge solutions is steeped in extensive research and experience gained from working with hundreds of thousands of leaders at all levels. Ranked among the world’s Top 5 providers of executive education by the Financial Times and in the Top 10 by Bloomberg BusinessWeek, CCL has offices in Greensboro, NC; Colorado Springs, CO; San Diego, CA; Brussels, Belgium; Moscow, Russia; Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; Johannesburg, South Africa; Singapore; Gurgaon, India; and Shanghai, China.