A New Approach to Self-Governance

Student self-governance has been a part of the University of Virginia since its earliest days. Today’s students take this core value to heart, and it remains a foundational part of their UVA experience. The Meriwether Lewis Institute for Citizen Leadership is a multiyear fellowship program that equips students for a lifetime of leadership. Participating students benefit from life-changing experiences right here on Grounds.

The Lewis Institute bolsters student self-governance by equipping students to take on roles as leaders and innovators while on Grounds. Students give back to the University in meaningful ways, embracing this experience as a training ground for citizen leadership.

An Immersive Experience

Many leadership programs require students to seek opportunities away from their institutions, but the Lewis Fellows, in the tradition of student self-governance, take on extraordinary levels of responsibility here on Grounds. After being selected in the fall of their second year, cohorts of 25 Lewis Fellows engage in rigorous, multiyear learning experiences. Three elements make up the Lewis Institute:

• **Academic Foundation**
  Fellows examine leadership from different perspectives by taking two required courses—at the McIntire School of Commerce and the Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy.

• **Summer Exploration**
  Fellows learn skills such as public speaking, budgeting, and interpersonal dynamics as part of a six-week summer program in Charlottesville. They conclude the summer by presenting a collaborative project to a diverse group of University stakeholders.

• **Meaningful Engagement**
  Finally, fellows apply their new knowledge to independent and small group projects aimed at addressing key University issues or advancing the work of student organizations.
A Lasting Impact

From Thomas Jefferson’s design for the Academical Village onward, UVA has encouraged collaborative learning in shared spaces. For their inaugural group project, the fellows worked in small teams to develop proposals for configuring a newly acquired building on the Corner into a multipurpose student space. The fellows worked with key University stakeholders, brainstorming ways to incorporate a diverse range of perspectives into their proposals. Finally, teams presented their findings before their peers, faculty, and staff. Several fellows now serve on the University committee responsible for renovating and operating the building.

“We invested in the Meriwether Lewis Institute because we believe in the power of leadership. UVA’s commitment to student self-governance makes it an ideal setting for the development of the problem-solving, communication, and strategic thinking skills that set students apart at UVA and beyond. We look forward to seeing the lasting impact the Lewis Fellows will have on the University.”

— William C. Sanders Jr. and Rebecca Sanders

Support the Lewis Institute

The Meriwether Lewis Institute for Citizen Leadership is made possible entirely through private philanthropy. A lead gift funds the first class of Lewis Fellows through their graduation, but to continue the program we must secure additional financial support. In addition to endowment and annual operating funds, there are many other gift opportunities.