Building a Better Life for Children

The children of the Huruma slums in Nairobi, Kenya, live in shanties without running water or electricity. Although schools are free in Kenya, these children have little hope of getting the kind of education that would enable them to escape the slums. Harrison Mungai Kihonge ’14, a Davis UWC Scholar from Kenya, is working with a school in Huruma to give the community’s children a better education and a better chance.

Kihonge is part of a team of 12 students that worked with the New Dawn Educational Center, cofounded by Kennedy Mugo ’12, to build a library that will give children access to educational materials. Kihonge and his teammates spent the summer of 2012 in Nairobi constructing the library. “Shelby Davis says, ‘You learn, you earn, and you return,’” Kihonge noted. “I am trying to give back what I can from the very little that I have.”

The Davis Challenge

The largest international scholarship program for undergraduates, the Davis United World College Scholars Program builds international understanding and educates leaders by creating clusters of globally aware and committed students at 90 partner institutions around the country. Since 2000, the program has brought 304 talented students from around the world to Middlebury.

Cofounder Shelby Davis has challenged Middlebury alumni, parents, and friends to match his contributions to establish an endowed fund that will provide financial aid to students from the United World Colleges. The minimum gift is $400,000. It will be paired with Davis’s gift to create an $800,000 endowment, which will provide $40,000 in financial aid for one student.
Changing Lives: The Program Impact

Allison Stanger
Russell J. Leng ’60 Professor of International Politics and Economics and Chair of the Department of Political Science

“The Davis Scholars program has done no less than transform the classroom environment in my courses. Not only are Davis Scholars some of the world’s best and brightest, but their stunning diversity enriches our in-class conversations immeasurably, inspiring other students to make their own unique contribution and strive to be the best they can be.”

Nelson Navarro ’12
Russian and German major from Salinas, California

“Many of my good friends are UWC scholars. Hearing the perspectives of friends from the international community has been a significant part of my learning experience at Middlebury, especially when they differ from my own or from those of many of the Americans I know.”

Harlem-Siu Marino Saavedra ’12
Davis UWC Scholar and Environmental Studies major from Tarapoto, Peru

“I feel incredibly happy to have been part of this place and community. I not only found my vocation and passion for environmental policy, I also found lifelong friends, people who helped me grow and became an important part of my education. Coming from a small city in Peru, none of these things would have been possible without the generosity of Shelby Davis and his family.”

Peter DeGraff
International Host Parent, resident of East Middlebury, Vermont

“Our family has been hosting students since our children were in their early teens, about 10 years so far. Being able to see the world through their eyes, hearing their stories and meeting their families has enriched our lives.”

Transforming a College

In its 12 years at Middlebury, the Davis UWC Scholars Program has brought a new and distinctive energy to campus. Davis UWC Scholars arrive with a sense of purpose and a determination to make the most of their educations. In sharing new perspectives, promoting dialogue, and exposing others to various forms of diversity, they have transformed the learning experience for everyone. The Davis UWC Program is one of the key reasons Middlebury can claim to be the first truly global liberal arts college.

Davis UWC Scholars Program at Middlebury

- Number of Scholars since 2000: 304
- Number of Scholars in 2012–13: 116
- Number of countries represented since 2000: 68
- Number of countries represented in 2012: 61
- Countries represented by the most current Scholars: USA, India
- Most popular majors for current Scholars: economics, international politics & economics, environmental studies
- Popular organizations: International Student Organization, Midd Alternative Break, Dolci cooking club
- Number of Scholars participating in the Spring Student Symposium: 15

A Scholar in Action

After Nial Rele ’12, a Davis UWC Scholar from India, spent a semester in China, he couldn’t wait to go back. An environmental studies major with a minor in Chinese, he applied for an internship with the Shanghai-based Joint US-China Collaboration on Clean Energy. “I wanted to work with a company that would help me develop both my passions—creating a greener future and learning language,” he says. Rele was assigned to a project called “China Dream.” The goal is to counter hyperconsumption by encouraging a low-carbon lifestyle. He found that he was well prepared for the challenge, thanks to his experience at Middlebury. Not only did it give him the language skills he needed, it prepared him to manage his time and to think holistically about the project. The internships has inspired Rele to continue working on clean-energy issues in China.