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Lewis Center for the Arts awards over $100,000 for summer projects in the arts to 53 Princeton students

Photo caption: Princeton students (left to right) William Keiser, Ugonna Nwabueze, and Shruthi Rajasekar are recipients of the Lewis Center for the Arts’ Alex Adam ’07 Award for 2017. 
Photo credits: Photo of William Keiser courtesy of William Keiser; photo of Ugonna Nwabueze by J.C. Nwabueze; photo of Shruthi Rajasekar by David Nie

(Princeton, NJ) The Lewis Center for the Arts announces over $100,000 in awards intended to support the summer projects and research of 53 Princeton students, chosen from 126 applicants. For many recipients the funding provides the resources to conduct research, undertake training, and pursue other opportunities critical to achieving their senior thesis project goals.
Three students — William Keiser, Ugonna Nwabueze, and Shruthi Rajasekar — have been selected for the Alex Adam ’07 Award. Established in memory of Alexander Jay Adam ’07 and made possible by a generous gift from his family, the award provides $7,500 in support to each of three Princeton undergraduates who will spend a summer pursuing a project that will result in the creation of new artistic work. While a student at Princeton, Alex Adam pursued artistic interests in creative writing and theater. Joyce Carol Oates, his creative writing professor, praised his work as “sharp-edged, unexpectedly corrosive and very funny.” He was also an actor, and performed with the Princeton Shakespeare Company, Theatre Intime, and the Program in Theater.

“The Alex Adam Award was created in loving memory of a wonderfully creative student,” says Michael Cadden, Chair of the Lewis Center. “Thanks to his family’s generosity, our young artists are able to pursue dream projects around the globe.”

This summer, sophomore William Keiser, a German major pursing a certificate in the Program in Dance, will embark on a project to practice directorship and bring together dancers to create three new works about American identity in the American southwest. Keiser, along with fellow Program in Dance students including sophomore Jhor van der Horst, will travel to Albuquerque, New Mexico, and rent space for three weeks from the New Mexico Dance Academy. The group will spend their days experimenting, rehearsing, and performing, with the end goal of producing a dance film, a community performance, and a major dance piece. Keiser’s interest in forms of dance he considers surreal — such as ballet and gaga, that also rely heavily on imagining the body — will guide the group’s movement generation.

Nwabueze, a junior and English major pursuing certificates in Theater, African Studies, and African American Studies, plans to use her funding to conduct interviews with female Liberian refugees in Ghana. For her senior acting thesis for the Program in Theater, Nwabueze aims to responsibly stage a play set in a war-torn African nation that brings to light issues of trauma, rape, and survival. Having not personally lived such experiences, Nwabueze, a first generation Nigerian American woman whose family has seen such wartime conditions firsthand, will embark on a journey of performative exploration. Nwabueze will first stop in Accra, Ghana, at
the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees headquarters to conduct interviews with a number of individuals. She will then travel by tow truck 27 miles outside of the capital to Buduburam, once a refugee camp but now a flourishing town that serves as home for a large population of Liberian refugees. There she will conduct more interviews, take photographs, and volunteer as a theater teacher to the local children. After spending three weeks in Buduburam, Nwabueze will travel to Krisan, Ghana, to an active refugee camp that is home to 1,700 people displaced from several African nations. There she will conduct research to aid her in writing a new play also set in a fictional African nation grappling with the devastating aftermath of a bloody tribal war. Nwabueze is President of Black Arts Company Drama, an A. Scott Berg Fellow, and volunteers as a drama teacher for junior high students.

A junior and native of Plymouth, Minnesota, with family roots in Tamil Nadu, India, Rajasekar has studied South Indian classical music for the past thirteen years and classical voice for the past seven, performing in the U.S., Europe, and India. Her composition, “Do Not Stand At My Grave and Weep,” was a winner of the 2016 Vox Nova Chorale Emerging Female Composers’ competition. A Music Composition major pursuing a certificate in Vocal Performance, Rajasekar is combining her interests in musical performance and composition to further study something she is passionate about — the unique music of Tamil cinema, or the music incorporated into popular films in “Kollywood,” the second largest film industry in India. She will spend eight weeks in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India, studying with composer Sean Roldan (stage name of R. Raghavendra), a young star in the Kollywood film music industry recognized globally for his incorporation of traditional idioms into contemporary settings. In preparation for her time with Roldan, Rajasekar will first spend two weeks learning new software with Steve Kaul, a prominent recording engineer in Minneapolis. The goal of her efforts is to acquire skills in popular melodies, rhythms, and studio-generated sounds while culling from her prior background in South Indian and Western classical music, ultimately composing her own score for a short film.

Juniors Rachel Schwartz and Emma Watkins have been selected for funding through the Mallach Senior Thesis Fund. This award established by Douglas J. Mallach ’91 supports the realization of
one or two proposed senior thesis projects that incorporate historical research and create an alternative path to learning history.

Schwartz is a junior and Visual Arts major through a collaborative program between the Department of Art and Archaeology and the Lewis Center’s Program in Visual Arts, and is pursuing a certificate in Dance. She will spend time in France and England studying food, dance, and sugar sculpture for her joint creative thesis in dance and visual arts, which will be centered on the meal as a social construct and ritual. At Princeton, Schwartz has studied food aesthetically, historically, anthropologically and creatively, and now desires to connect food to movement. In England, she will attend the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery to learn about “Food and Landscape,” the topic of this year’s symposium, which will help her cast vision for scenic landscapes. In France, Schwartz will learn how to make sculptures from sugar at the École Gastronomique Bellouet Conseil in Paris, a substance and skill that she will incorporate into her thesis performance. While in Paris she also plans to take dance classes at the Paris Marais Dance School and attend performances at the Paris Opera Ballet and Les Étés de la Dance Paris festival.

Watkins, a junior and English major pursuing certificates in Theater, Music Theater and Environmental Studies, plans to use her funding to travel to Wales to study the storytelling traditions of her ancestors and to hike through “the green chapels” of their mythology. Her research will culminate in a new storytelling venture of her own that will serve as her senior thesis: an immersive music theater retelling of the life of Rhiannon, an empowered woman in Welsh mythology who, when falsely accused of eating her own son, is forced to become the reluctant storyteller of a violent act she did not perpetrate. Watkins will hike along Wales’ coastline and through its mountains, visiting landmarks mentioned in Rhiannon’s story and recording the natural soundscapes at these sites for use in her musical compositions. Her creative work will be inspired by Welsh folk music festivals, a course of study at the Bleddfa Week of Storytelling, and Welsh language classes. She will also conduct interviews with artists, musicians and historians who, together, serve as the keepers of Welsh culture and identity.

Sophomore Nicolette D’Angelo has been selected for funding from the recently established Sam Hutton Fund for the Arts. This award was instituted by Thomas C. Hutton ’72 and supports
undergraduate summer study, travel and thesis research in the Lewis Center. D’Angelo, a Classics major pursuing a certificate in Creative Writing, plans to write a book of investigative and research-based “found poetry” — a written collage of others’ voices, articles, textbooks, and even other poems — focusing on the challenges of eating disorder treatment in America. This project was largely inspired by C.D. Wright’s *One Big Self* and other “found” poetry she studied in an introductory poetry course led by poet and Director of Creative Writing Tracy K. Smith. Using her award funds, D’Angelo will travel to Robert Wood Johnson Hospital, McLean Hospital, Remuda Ranch, and several other American treatment facilities to speak about her personal experience recovering from an eating disorder, as well as to conduct interviews with old acquaintances and hear from volunteers willing to speak about their lived experiences in hospitals and related institutions. D’Angelo aims to put her own story and those of others in conversation with one another to reveal the shortcomings of America’s current systems for eating disorder treatment.

Sophomores Annabel Barry and Justin Sansone each received a travel stipend from the Timothy K. Vasen Award for Summer Research, a new fund established in memory of Vasen, who directed plays and taught classes in the Program in Theater from 1993 through 2015 and served as the Program’s Director from 2012 until his untimely death in 2015. This fund supports summer travel for students who are pursuing creative projects at the Lewis Center. Sansone will study in Greece, while Barry will be in Ireland. Both countries held great interest for Vasen.

Junior Gabrielle Chen has been selected as the recipient of the Lucas Summer Fellowship, which is presented annually to one or more juniors for summer thesis work in any media.

Juniors Kyle Berlin and Mariah Wilson have been awarded grants from the Mary Quaintance ’84 Fund for the Creative Arts established in her memory to foster talents similar to those Quaintance developed in writing, film studies, and literature in the creative arts programs at Princeton.

Juniors Helen Lin and Kathleen Ma have received grants from the E. Ennalls Berl 1912 and Charles Waggaman Berl 1917 Senior Thesis Award in Visual Arts, which was established in
1999 by Marie Broadhead to provide support for research, travel or other expenses of current juniors undertaking senior thesis work in the Program in Visual Arts.

Junior Heather Grace and junior Anhar Karim are beneficiaries of the Lawrence P. Wolfen ’87 Senior Thesis Award established for travel or research costs, materials, equipment or other expenses of current juniors for thesis work in the creative arts, especially the visual arts or graphic arts.

Junior Daniel Krane has received support from the Mellor Fund for Undergraduate Research, which underwrites course, travel, and/or research costs related to studies in the creative and performing arts.

Junior Melanie Berman received support from the Carpenter Family Fund for Comparative Literature and the Creative Arts established by Katherine R.R. Carpenter ’79 to provide support for teaching and research at the Lewis Center for collaborations between the Center and the Department of Comparative Literature.

In addition, 36 other students have received support through the Peter B. Lewis Summer Fund, with grants ranging from $500 to $5,000.

To learn more about the Lewis Center for the Arts and the funding available to Princeton students visit: arts.princeton.edu.

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