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**Class of 2020
Durham, NC**

M My Burch Fellowship took me to two of the most important capitals in the world: London and Washington, D.C. Both are places where anti-immigrant sentiment is rising. Taking up the fight against it are artists and activists. My involvement in current politics has exposed me to different debates over immigration. While many of these debates are rooted in economics, political scientists agree that opinions are more often based on underlying cultural perceptions. The Burch Fellowship allowed me to explore how activists and artists aim to change the narratives that lead to negative perceptions of immigrants.

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London, UK

NARRATIVE SHIFTING FROM GRASSROOTS CAMPAIGN

I began my fellowship experience with an internship at Let Us Learn, a young migrant rights campaign in London which works to ease the burden of the immigration process on those brought to the U.K. as children. I had intended to compare the Let Us Learners to the DREAMERs because I saw the similarities in their status as



undocumented young migrants, but as I learned more about the campaign, I realized that the struggles each group faced were unique and distinctive to each country's political climate. Over the course of four weeks, I learned the ins and outs of the British immigration system. Part of my responsibility with the organization was to answer questions that young migrants had about their access to university funding. In the U.K. students are able to get a loan from the government to attend university at a subsidized rate. Unfortunately, migrants without the correct status do not have access to this program and many of them do not know this until they are applying for universities. The most significant victory of the Let Us Learn team was when the Supreme Court voted in *R (Tigere) v Secretary of State for Business* that blocking students with discretionary leave



to remain from funding was a disproportionate interference on their right to education. The Let Us Learn team had led the campaign to gather support from both Parliament and the public. What inspired me about the LUL team is that after this victory they immediately began to work on other immigration related issues.

On four separate occasions during my month with Let Us Learn, we met with members of Parliament (MPs) to try and gather support. This was an amazing opportunity to meet British politicians and see how political structures differ between our countries. Most of the MPs were supportive of

the plight of the young migrants and offered varying degrees of assistance. A member of the House of Lords, Lord Taverne, raised an important point. He brought up how government officials prioritize the issues that the public care about. When polled, 70% of people said that they agreed with how the Home Office was handling immigration. With polls saying that the public supports current policies, politicians are unlikely to push for change. It then becomes the job of activists to change public opinion. For the last two weeks of my fellowship experience, I was in Washington, D.C. This portion of my project was focused on interviewing artists that were involved in social action around immigration. The decision to leave your home isn't easy and they wanted to show what immigrants go through on their journeys. I had the opportunity to meet with Kara Watkins, who works on the

committee to establish the Smithsonian National American Latino Museum. Kara spoke of how it was important for people to



be able to see how long American Latino history is, as Latinos have been in America before it was even a country. Despite this reality, their story has increasingly been tied only to recent immigration. Retelling stories is necessary to combat the negative images that many people conjure when they think of different minority groups. Having their stories told in the Smithsonian is a first step to giving them the legitimacy they deserve. The Burch Fellowship exposed me to how people try and promote unity in divisive environments and the skills I have learned will be applicable for the rest of my life. The most important skill I learned was that life does not mirror statistics. In preparation for my fellowship I looked up everything I could on the UK's immigration system. I thought I knew what I needed to make an impact, but when I arrived it quickly became clear that I needed to focus on listening and understanding before my ideas would have legitimacy. Sometimes it was the smallest detail of a policy that was causing the most harm and that could only be learned from speaking to the people most affected by it. I learned to consider if I was approaching an issue from a privileged perspective and wherever my life goes from here, I will take and apply this new found awareness.

