The Kuzmier-Lee-Nikitine Endowment Fund

About the KLN Fund

The Kuzmier-Lee-Nikitine (KLN) Endowment Fund was established in 1993 to commemorate the lives of three Master of Environmental Management graduates—Kerrie Kuzmier, Pavlik Nikitine, and Steve Lee—who were lost in 1993 under tragic circumstances. Each was deeply committed to advancing environmental sustainability and making a meaningful global impact. Classmates, friends, and family established the KLN Fund to carry forward their legacy by supporting future environmental leaders. Since its founding, the fund has awarded grants to over 65 Nicholas School students, enabling international internships and research across six continents and 22 countries.

Duke UNIVERSITY

Meet Emily Siegel MEM'25, Summer 2024 KLN Fund Recipient

Thanks to the generous funding from the KLN Endowment Fund, Emily Siegel spent the summer of 2024 as a research assistant for Game Rangers International, a wildlife conservation organization in Zambia, where she conducted elephant research at their Orphan Release Facility in Kafue National Park. For Emily's research, she worked alongside NSOE Ph.D. candidate Halina Malinowski to compare the body condition and movement patterns of orphans, wild, and orphan-released elephants.

"The Career & Professional Development Center (CPDC) has really helped me through the funding application process. Without their support, and generous funding from the KLN Endowment Fund, this summer experience would not have been financially possible." - Emily Siegel MEM'25

KLN Fund Summer 2025 Recipient: Julia Kagiliery

"I just wanted to take a moment to express my appreciation for the support I received during my summer experience with Improper Water! Improper is a non-profit organization founded by a Duke student that focuses on sustainable financing of water improvement projects like wells and latrines by planting and selling ground cover coffee. Our goal is to reforest land parcels in vulnerable communities to provide employment opportunities and funding for improving lives in rural Madagascar. The KLN fund provides me the opportunity to travel to Madagascar and participate with water quality sampling and witness well installations. This gave me a behind-the-scenes look at the nonprofit world and confirmed my desire to enter that space post-graduation. Thank you again for your support."

- Julia Kagiliery MEM'26

More on Julia's work with Planet Lab

Julia's research interests are broadly focused on how people and the environment interact. Within the Planet Lab, she has worked extensively in Southeastern Madagascar to understand how hydrology and water-related diseases are linked and how they are impacting public health in the region.

Domestically, she is interested in how power outages are impacting emergency and supportive services in North Carolina. Primarily, she leverages data to better understand how people experience the world and climate change in order to improve outcomes.

KLN Fund Summer 2025 Recipient: Cole Roxbury

“This summer, I traveled to Cape Town, South Africa, to work with the Institute for Sustainable Townships Enterprise Development (InSTED) to explore how interactions with local and Indigenous communities can inform policy and corporate sustainability strategies. The trip, originally planned as a two-week student program, was redesigned as a one-week experience for educators, community stakeholders, and a student consultant.

The trip revealed how apartheid’s legacy still shapes fragile communities, but also how resilience and antifragility emerge through education, entrepreneurship, cultural expression, and environmental restoration. For me, the experience underscored that sustainability and policy strategies must be grounded in community voices. Universities and study abroad programs—when linked to student-led, community-driven research—can play a critical role in amplifying those voices, enriching both students and the communities they engage. I plan to continue working with InSTED, offering my expertise in developing solutions that prioritize sustainable practices and equitable outcomes.

Being in Langa and meeting its residents showed me that many communities are often overlooked when shaping large-scale strategy, which is a critical mistake. There is so much to learn from and contribute to in local communities, especially given the deep and sometimes painful histories they carry. Moving forward, I will intentionally consider people whose voices are not always heard and recognize the vital role communities play in shaping sustainability strategy.”

- Cole Roxbury MEM’26

KLN Fund Summer 2025 Recipient: Kabryn Mattison

“I completed a comparative herpetofauna (reptile and amphibian) survey of Nusa Penida island in Indonesia, to better understand the diversity and conservation status of amphibians and reptiles on the island. Many reptiles and amphibians around the world are imperilled, and while having some of the highest biodiversity on the planet, Indonesia is wildly understudied. During my time on Nusa Penida, I conducted field surveys around the island, searching for herps, and having some amazing adventures along the way. I encountered the rare white-lipped tree viper, spitting cobras, Brahminy blind snakes (an all female species that reproduced via parthenogenesis!), and many rare species of frogs and lizards. One of the frogs I encountered, the crab-eating frog, is the only known amphibian in the world that can survive salt water! I hope you can tell from my excitement that this project solidified my passion for conservation, and really reminded me of the wonders of our beautiful planet.

Your support made it possible for me to contribute to an urgently needed update on Nusa Penida’s herpetofauna diversity, while also growing tremendously as a researcher and conservationist. This experience has deepened my commitment to advancing biodiversity research and community-centered conservation, the two main reasons why I wanted to pursue my Master of Environmental Management at Duke in the first place.

Thank you again for investing in my academic and professional journey, and for helping make this important fieldwork possible. I am excited to carry these lessons forward and to continue building on the foundation your support helped me create.” - Kabryn Mattison MEM’26