

Fred Russell-Grantland Rice Scholarship in Sports Journalism, 2024–2025



Lucas Frederick Rollfinke

College of Arts and Science, Class of 2025

Economics, Mathematics

Timonium, MD

“Thank you so much for helping me to attend one of the best universities in the world. Throughout my four years here, I have grown more than I could've imagined as an individual, learned so much about the world around me, and formed friendships that will last a lifetime. Without your kindness and generosity, none of that would have been possible. I will forever be grateful for your help in providing me with the experience of a lifetime.”

What advice would you give to an incoming first-year student on how to make the most out of their Vanderbilt experience?

My advice to an incoming first-year student would be to try out as many different opportunities as possible. Vanderbilt offers a wide array of extracurricular activities that allow students to further immerse themselves in their college experiences. I have met some of my closest friends and made some of my best memories because of the various student organizations that I joined. Whether through my time playing on the club baseball team or writing for the Vanderbilt Hustler, I have found that the opportunities this school has provided to me outside the classroom have been equally as valuable as those inside of it. I would encourage all future students to take advantage of everything this school has to offer and push themselves out of their comfort zones in order to make the most of their time here on campus.

Describe an experience like an internship, a research assistantship, a leadership position, or study abroad, that helped you grow personally and/or professionally.

Last semester, I had the opportunity to study abroad in Copenhagen. I consider myself to be very "home-oriented", so leaving my friends and family behind to spend four months in a foreign country was a daunting task. That being said, I could not be more happy with how my decision turned out. Not only did I become much more independent throughout my time in Denmark, but I also became much more socially aware and well-versed in cultures outside of the United States. Through my interactions with fellow students and professors, as well as my study tours which introduced me to individuals and businesses from across the continent, I became much more comfortable in my understanding of how different cultures can come together to work towards a common goal. I strongly believe that the things I learned in Copenhagen will benefit me not only throughout my professional experiences but throughout all facets of my adult life.

How has Opportunity Vanderbilt, the university's initiative to meet the financial needs of every undergraduate through scholarship support, affected your life at Vanderbilt and beyond?

It is not an exaggeration to say that without Opportunity Vanderbilt, I would not have been able to embark on the most transformative four years of my life. I come from a relatively humble background, with both of my parents being teachers, so when I began my college search I was hoping to find a place that aligned not only with my educational goals but also with my family's financial capabilities. Opportunity Vanderbilt made attending one of the most well-regarded universities in the country a realistic possibility, and I am so incredibly grateful that it has become a reality. Over the past four years, I have learned more than I can put into words and have grown so much not only as a student but as a person. Furthermore, I feel fortunate to say that I will graduate from Vanderbilt debt-free and will be able to begin my adult life without the financial burden that so many young adults are currently facing.

What are your plans following graduation, and how did your time at Vanderbilt influence those plans?

After graduation, I am planning to move to Chicago and begin working as an actuarial analyst. The process of becoming an actuary is long and difficult, but Vanderbilt prepared me for it through the rigorous course load and excellent professors I have been exposed to in the math department. While many individuals entering the field struggle to pass the exams required to become certified, I have found that much of the material is already familiar to me due to courses I have taken here at Vanderbilt, and I have consequently been able to pass the first two on my first attempt. In addition, it's worth noting that living in a city like Chicago never crossed my mind before I came to Vanderbilt. Since arriving here, however, I have met many individuals from the Midwest who have encouraged me to consider it, and after spending last summer living in the center of Chicago, I could not be more excited to move there after graduation. Finally, I also plan to continue my pursuit of sports journalism on the side as it remains one of my greatest passions.

What is the most important thing Vanderbilt taught you? What are you most proud of accomplishing during your time at Vanderbilt?

The most important thing Vanderbilt has taught me is to push yourself out of your comfort zone. In both social and academic situations, Vanderbilt has encouraged me to try new things, meet new people, and embrace new experiences. As a result, I have pushed myself to take classes in subjects I know nothing about (such as astronomy), write articles about sports I have never participated in (such as swimming), and form friendships with people from different backgrounds. The thing that I am most proud of from my time here at Vanderbilt is the relationships I have made, as I am sure that they will last well beyond my time at this school. Had I not become comfortable and confident in pushing myself to meet new people, I would not have been able to form the friendships and bonds that I will rely upon as I enter the next phase of my life.

How has your Immersion experience complemented your Vanderbilt education? Was there a specific moment during your experience when you were able to make connections with what you've learned in the classroom?

I have chosen to use my time studying abroad as my Immersion experience and as I mentioned above, that experience was a tremendous complement to my Vanderbilt education. If I had to choose one moment in which I made connections between what I was learning in Copenhagen and what I have learned here at Vanderbilt, I would say the study tour my class took to Vienna and Bratislava. Throughout the five-day trip, we met with individuals from companies such as Volkswagen and government organizations such as the United Nations. We were encouraged to form connections not only with the courses we were taking in Denmark but also with those we had taken back in the United States. I found my teachings particularly helpful during our visit with the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, as the critical-thinking skills and ability to ask thought-provoking questions that I have developed here at Vanderbilt enabled me to engage with the speaker and inquire about her company's morally questionable activities. I am excited to get to work on my research paper about my experience in the coming weeks, as I plan to explore the economic, social, and political similarities and differences that I was exposed to during my time abroad.