

# EXCEL 2019

EXCELLENCE IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP,  
CAREER EMPOWERMENT & LEADERSHIP



SCHOOL OF  
MUSIC, THEATRE & DANCE  
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

The University of Michigan's Excellence in Entrepreneurship, Career Empowerment & Leadership (**EXCEL**) Lab is uniquely situated at the epicenter of three ecosystems. We operate within the renowned School of Music, Theatre & Dance (SMTD), yet also actively engage more broadly with U-M's top-ranked research and academic communities. And we are proud to be a part of the University's **#1-ranked** collegiate entrepreneurship network.

We believe that a collaborative approach is critical to delivering entrepreneurship training and career services at the highest level. Indeed, partnerships open up opportunities to engage diverse professionals and expand the possibilities around experiential learning. Putting students at the center of these activities gives them a more realistic picture of what professional life in the arts looks like. It's a strategy that is paying dividends back to our students in a myriad of ways.

This year we partnered with SMTD's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion office to launch the first EXCEL Career Expo focused on social entrepreneurship. It brought dozens of students into conversation with faculty, regional professionals, and members of Decoda (Affiliate Ensemble of Carnegie Hall) on how the arts can enrich our communities and catalyze social change. Our ongoing relationship with the University Career Center led to a one-day immersion to the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, resulting in four new internships and the birth of yet another SMTD partnership. National Sawdust again hosted several student composers and chamber groups for a concert funded in part by EXCEL that earned rave reviews. In tandem with music technology partner Real Industry, we brought the Pandora Challenge back to campus. More than 50 students participated in a design challenge that raised awareness for a local animal shelter (Barn Sanctuary) while beta-testing new features on Pandora Radio.

These are just a few of the dozens of guests talks and workshops we have hosted through direct collaboration with every SMTD Department, and our incredible friends at University Musical Society.

All this is possible thanks to the transformative support of the **Meta Weiser EXCEL Fund**, which continues to allow us to pursue bold projects while honing our ability to serve our students. Their creativity, grit, and commitment to social good are illustrated on the pages that follow.

*Front cover: Merrily We Roll Along* by **Runyonland Productions** (p. 19)



# COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS



*"I thought the activity was a great way to get us thinking about needs in the community and how to organize ourselves to best meet those needs."*

**Eileen Rodriguez** (BM '20, voice)  
on the DEI & EXCEL Career Expo featuring Carnegie Hall-based ensemble Decoda

# EXCEL'S HISTORY



## Founding

EXCEL was founded in Fall 2015 with initial funding support from the **Transforming Learning for a Third-Century Initiative**, and grew out of the identified goals of enhancing SMTD's student and alumni career development resources.



## Coursework

EXCEL's coursework piloted as three one-credit mini courses and has since grown into an offering of over 20 rotating courses. These classes allow students to learn new skills and strategies to amplify their artistry, taught by a variety of experts from the U-M community. (p. 12)



## Initial Student Funding

The first cohort of 12 EXCEerator Fellow projects represented a diverse palette of entrepreneurial activity. In just a few months, they created prototypes, launched an arts festival, were selected for the optiMize social innovation challenge bootcamp and the Ann Arbor SPARK bootcamp.



## EXCEL Prize

EXCEL Prizes of \$10,000 have been awarded annually to outstanding student entrepreneurs whose young but established ventures demonstrate significant social impact. (p. 10)



## Cultivating Student Leaders

More than two dozen SMTD students have earned expansive leadership training through the **Dean's Liaison** program, which places exceptional students in paid administrative internships in offices across SMTD. (Learn about one of our most recent Liaisons on p. 18)

## Meta Weiser EXCEL Fund

Retired Ambassador and U-M Regent **Ronald N. Weiser** (BBA '66) and **Eileen Weiser** (MM '75) designated a \$1 million gift to establish the Meta Weiser EXCEL Fund in honor of Ronald Weiser's mother. This transformative gift supports workshops, guest residencies, and wide-ranging funding for student projects, ventures, internships, and other experiential learning opportunities. (p. 20-21)

## Thriving Partnerships

EXCEL thrives through collaborations with faculty and students from every SMTD department, programs throughout the **#1-ranked** U-M entrepreneurial ecosystem, and via ongoing partnerships with organizations like The Metropolitan Opera, National Sawdust, University Musical Society, the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center, DanceWorks Chicago, and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. At EXCEL we aim to provide personalized, intensive, and self-directed experiential learning opportunities on and off-campus for every SMTD student.

## EXCEL as a Department

EXCEL became a department in 2017, which supports a new SMTD Graduate Certificate in Performing Arts Management and Entrepreneurship, and an expanded minor in Performing Arts Management and Entrepreneurship. (Learn more about our courses on p. 12)

## Funding to Date

Since 2015 EXCEL has distributed **\$345,012.89** to hundreds of enterprising students from across all SMTD departments, often in collaboration with peers from other UM units. This funding has helped launch **268** projects, **70** internships, and supported the growth of **26** student-led ventures. (Learn about the most recent EXCEerator cohort on p. 18-19)

## New York City Immersion

In May 2018, EXCEL took 25 students to New York City for three days of intensive activities. Selected students participated in performance or arts administration events. Over the course of the weekend the group attended a Broadway show, connected with SMTD alumni working in the arts in New York, and visited cultural organizations like Carnegie Hall and National Sawdust. The trip was repeated with improvements and additional visits in May 2019. (Learn more about our immersion program on p. 15).

*"The EXCEerator gave Front Porch the tools, inspiration, and permission to dream bigger and broaden our impact beyond Ann Arbor. Thanks to the funding and mentorship Front Porch received, we were able to build tours in New England and Atlanta this summer in addition to developing other projects."*

**Karalyn Schubring** (BM '20, composition)  
Front Porch (p. 18)





# EXCEL

shines a spotlight on our students' capacity to imagine and realize creative projects, catalyzed through the annual distribution of \$100,000 in project, venture, and internship funding.

*"With the support of EXCEL, I have been able to reach further in my artistic growth as a director and producer than I would have ever thought possible while being in college."*

**Vincent Ford Jr.** (BFA '20, theatre)  
Crowns: A Gospel Musical (p. 18)

# FUNDING STRUCTURE

EXCEL funding is split into three categories

**EXCEL PRIZE**  
**\$10,000**

**EXCELERATOR FELLOWS**  
**\$25,000**

**ENTERPRISE &  
INTERNSHIP FUNDS**  
**\$65,000**



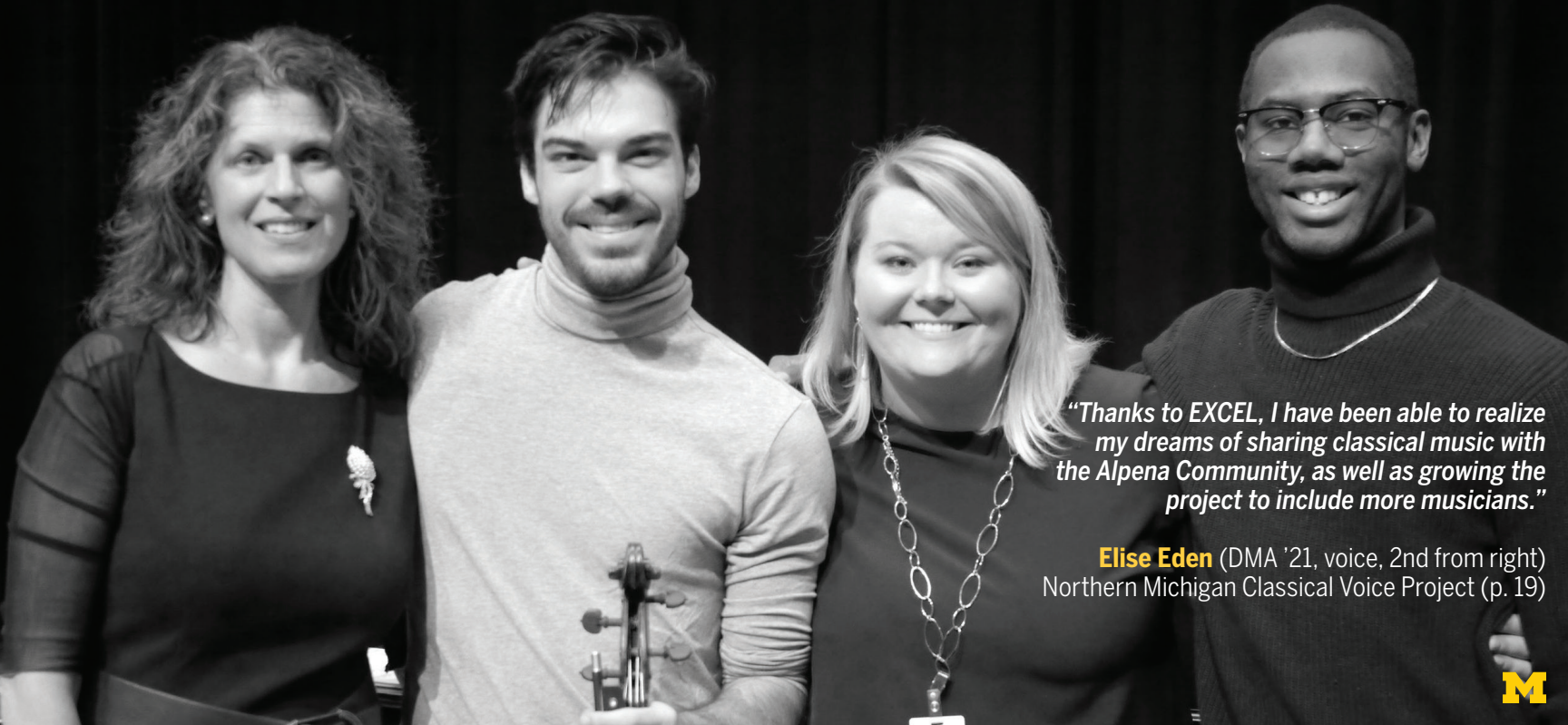


# ENTERPRISE FUND

offers micro grants of up to \$1,500 for student projects that deliver significant professional development and community impact.

# INTERNSHIP FUND

provides student grant awards of up to \$1,000 to cover living and travel expenses related to summer internships. Over \$66,198 has been awarded to date for 70 internships across the U.S. and abroad.



*"Thanks to EXCEL, I have been able to realize my dreams of sharing classical music with the Alpena Community, as well as growing the project to include more musicians."*

**Elise Eden** (DMA '21, voice, 2nd from right)  
Northern Michigan Classical Voice Project (p. 19)



“The Performing Arts EXCEerator incubator experience has made my dream of launching a high level string chamber festival in my hometown of Oaxaca, Mexico come true. I have to keep pinching myself, it’s so surreal! Thank you EXCEL! You all make dreams come true.”

**Gwendolyn Matias-Ryan** (Specialist '19, viola)  
SA' (p. 19)





# THE PERFORMING ARTS EXCELERATOR

is an entrepreneurial incubator program that supports performing arts ventures with seed funding and expert mentorship. Fellows are chosen by application during the Fall semester, and pilot, assess, and launch their ventures during the Winter term. Each team receives intensive mentorship from leading arts professionals representing organizations like International Contemporary Ensemble, Imani Winds, The Muny (St. Louis), DanceWorks Chicago, and many others.

# 26

**TEAMS HAVE BEEN  
SUPPORTED BY EXCEL  
WITH VENTURES RANGING  
FROM PERFORMING  
ENSEMBLES TO EDUCATIONAL  
ORGANIZATIONS**

# EXCEL PRIZE

awards \$10,000 annually to a School of Music, Theatre & Dance student or team in recognition of excellence in performing arts entrepreneurship, leadership, and social impact.

## 2019 EXCEL PRIZE WINNER:

**Anchorage Chamber Music Festival** was founded in 2013 as the first top-quality, pre-college summer intensive chamber music program in Anchorage, Alaska. The festival has since helped more than 250 local students reach artistic excellence through their lessons, coachings, workshops, and by attending first-rate concerts performed by renowned guest artists from across North America and abroad. The EXCEL Prize will allow the ACMF to expand its artist faculty and enhance their already robust offerings.

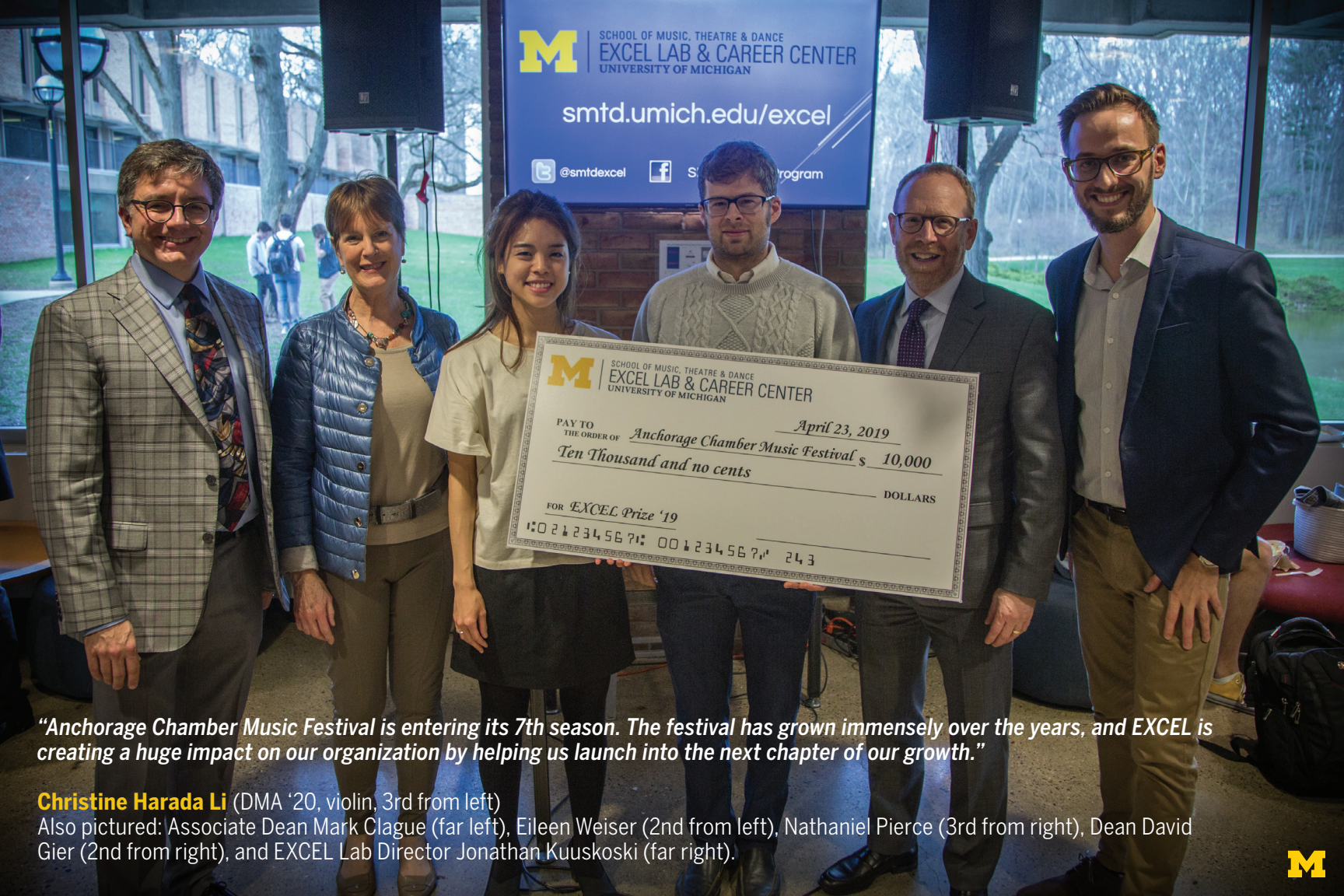
## PREVIOUS EXCEL PRIZE WINNERS:

**The SMTD & Our Own Thing Piano Partnership Program** (EXCEL Prize '18) provides free weekly piano lessons to Ypsilanti students and was created to address the lack of diversity and representation in the field of classical piano. The EXCEL Prize allowed the program to supply students with keyboards for practice, give additional training for instructors, and support guest artist workshops.

**Threads All Arts Festival** (EXCEL Prize '17) began as an EXCEerator team, working to showcase artists of various disciplines. The EXCEL Prize allowed the team to expand the festival to two stages over three days and add elements like interactive installations.

**Girls Rock Detroit** (EXCEL Prize '16) promotes creative expression and self-esteem in young women and gender non-conforming youth through a week-long summer camp focused on music education. The EXCEL Prize allowed them to expand their programming and start an instrument loan program.





*"Anchorage Chamber Music Festival is entering its 7th season. The festival has grown immensely over the years, and EXCEL is creating a huge impact on our organization by helping us launch into the next chapter of our growth."*

**Christine Harada Li** (DMA '20, violin, 3rd from left)

Also pictured: Associate Dean Mark Clague (far left), Eileen Weiser (2nd from left), Nathaniel Pierce (3rd from right), Dean David Gier (2nd from right), and EXCEL Lab Director Jonathan Kuuskoski (far right).



# COURSEWORK

EXCEL offers a comprehensive yet flexible curriculum to give Michigan students a competitive edge as they transition into professional life. These can be taken individually or as part of either the **Performing Arts Management and Entrepreneurship Minor** or the **Graduate Certificate in Arts Entrepreneurship & Leadership**. Select courses also count as electives for the cross-campus **Entrepreneurship Minor**.

## A SAMPLE OF OUR COURSE OFFERINGS

**Music Industry Workshop:** Taught by Jonathan Kuuskoski. Students work in teams to envision and iterate a music-oriented business—along the way assessing opportunities and risks, researching customers, and piloting a Minimum Viable Project.

**Writing About Your Art:** Taught by Andrew Kuster. Students identify their creative voice and learn how to inspire others to support their art through blogs, websites, program notes, and social media content creation.

**Producing in the American Theatre:** Taught by Greg Poggi. A history of American theatre, emphasizing the development of producing techniques framed around significant productions of the 20th Century, taught by an expert with 20+ years of professional theatre management experience.

**Running Your Own Ensemble, Theatre Troupe, or Dance Company:** Taught by Kari Landry. Students learn how to design their own arts organization, connect with communities, and jumpstart an entrepreneurial career path under the tutelage of an Akropolis Reed Quintet co-founder.



*"The EXCEL program is such an amazing resource that helps students take their wild and crazy artistic dreams and turn them into a reality. Over the past four years of teaching "Running Your Own Ensemble, Theatre Troupe, or Dance Company" I have been honored to help students build entrepreneurial ventures from the ground up, where many of their ideas, ensembles, and businesses are still growing and thriving today."*

**Kari Landry** (BM '11, clarinet, front row, far left), EXCEL Instructor, founding member of Akropolis Reed Quintet





*"EXCEL has given me the chance to refine my leadership skills by curating and producing an activism-themed student choreography showcase. I am endlessly grateful for the opportunity to bring awareness to the incredible talent of my fellow Dance majors, and the unique privilege we have as artists to effect social change."*

**Victoria Briones**, (BFA '21, dance)  
Arts in Color (p. 18); UMS 21st Century Intern  
(The Joyce Theater & American Ballet Theatre)



Fostering opportunities for U-M students to develop their skills through experiential learning is at the core of EXCEL's mission. Partnerships with nationally recognized organizations provide our students with unique opportunities for interactive learning, critical thinking, and networking.

## IMMERSIONS

Immersion provide valuable opportunities to cultivate professional relationships and go behind the scenes of established arts organizations. EXCEL continued to expand local immersion experiences this year with a visit to the **Detroit Symphony Orchestra**. 14 students attended a half-day session that included a tour of the DSO's extensive facilities, a panel discussion with members of the staff, interactive small group assignments, and a full performance of the orchestra. Past local immersions have included **Michigan Opera Theatre** and we have supported other trips led by SMTD faculty to the Steinway factory in New York City and the Indianapolis International Violin Competition.

We took 24 students on our second **New York City** immersion, which included three days of intensive activities. Half of the students participated in a performance track, where they sat in a Broadway pit orchestra and learned from seasoned freelancers under the oversight of SMTD alumni **Connie Barron** (BM '69, MM '74, voice) and **John Miller** (BM '68, double bass) about the realities of playing on Broadway. The other half of our student cohort explored arts management through a behind-the-scenes visit to **National Sawdust**, discussions with team members from **Pomegranate Arts**, **The Metropolitan Opera**, and **Abraham.In.Motion**, and small group visits to **Carnegie Hall**, **Disney Theatrical Group**, **Martha Graham Dance**, and **The New York Philharmonic**.

## INTERNSHIPS

EXCEL has supported **70** student internships at organizations across the country, from the GRAMMY's to Moogfest, while maintaining ongoing internship partnerships with The Metropolitan Opera, the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center, the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Connecticut Summerfest, and UMS' 21st Century Artist Internship program. The latter annually places four SMTD students in leading performing arts companies each summer along with a \$5,000 stipend.



# CAREER COUNSELING

Students may schedule 1:1 counseling appointments with an EXCEL representative, including guidance on resumes, cover letters, and grant proposals. Appointments are adapted to the needs of each student. They may also explore complex topics like how to conceive and launch projects with minimal resources, or how to develop an action plan around long-term career goals.

## OPEN LAB

EXCEL launched a new series in fall 2018 called the Open Lab, which focuses on in-depth workshops on specific topics. Past sessions have included a gamified grant-writing workshop featuring **SMTD Alumni Award winners** and a session with **Imani Winds** focused on developing community engagement demonstrations.

*"The EXCEL Department has the capacity to transform small ideas and informal conversations into impactful, real projects that can bring change and positivity to a community, as it has with the Third Place Concert Series. I'm so grateful for the funding EXCEL has provided, but also thankful for the endless guidance, expertise, and encouragement the EXCEL staff continuously offers its students."*

**Wesley Hornpetrie** (SM '18, Cello Performance)  
Third Place Concert Series (p. 19)



# EXCEL TALKS

feature Q&A's with leading arts professionals that delve into a variety of discipline-specific topics.

## Past EXCEL Talks have featured members of:

The New York Philharmonic  
The Berlin Philharmonic  
Meredith Monk Vocal Ensemble  
American Repertory Theater  
The St. Lawrence String Quartet  
Royal Shakespeare Company  
Third Coast Percussion  
Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center  
International Contemporary Ensemble  
Los Angeles Opera  
RIOULT Dance NY  
PRISM Quartet  
Imani Winds

*"The EXCEL Enterprise Grant allowed me to take the idea for my very first movie and make it into a reality. Because of this program we were able to film using professional grade equipment, elevating the quality of our work and making us competitive at more prestigious festivals. 'Inhuman' was invited to the Cannes Film Festival Short Film Corner and is currently playing at festivals across the globe."*

**Hayley Tibbenham** (BMA '20, voice)  
Inhuman (p. 18)



# EXCEL FUNDED, STUDENT-LED PROJECTS

**Arts in Color** is a student organization committed to addressing issues of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in the Dance Department and larger U-M arts community. They host film screenings, a monthly newsletter, and DEI-focused performance and networking events with leading companies like Hubbard Street Dance Chicago and DanceWorks Chicago.

**Crowns: A Gospel Musical**, the acclaimed musical by Regina Taylor, was staged by SMTD students in fall 2019. It explores racial identity through the coming-of-age story of a young African American girl who relocates to the South from Brooklyn after she loses her brother to street violence.

**Front Porch\*** is a dynamic chamber ensemble that strives to reshape the performer/audience rituals that surround the traditional concert experience. They have premiered more than a dozen works for their unique instrumentation (violin, bassoon, piano, and percussion) and recently embarked on tours to Atlanta and New York City.

**Inhuman** is a short film written, directed, and starring SMTD student Hayley Tibbenham. It was selected for participation at the 2019 Cannes Film Festival Short Film Corner and will be included in other festivals in the coming months.

**The Latin American Music Initiative (LAMI)\*** aims to convene a global audience for the music of Latin American composers by creating critical editions of inaccessible masterworks, and through dynamic live performances and educational workshops.

*"The EXCEL department has truly been a tremendous game changer during my time at U-M. Serving as a **Dean's Liaison** has allowed me to take steps toward creating a career path for myself that I did not know existed, and helped me make connections that will shape the rest of my life."*

**Carrli Cooper** (BTA '21, stage management)  
Dean's Liaison, Engagement & Outreach



**Northern Michigan Classical Voice Project**, created by SMTD student and Alpena High School alumna Elise Eden, brings SMTD students to Alpena High School for several school-wide performances and 1:1 music coachings, with the aim of developing an annual residency program.

**Runyonland Productions\*** produces Broadway-level artistic experiences and provides educational outlets for young artists and creators at the University of Michigan. After a series of successful productions in Ann Arbor, Runyonland will be a co-producer of their first Broadway show, David Byrne's *American Utopia*, in fall 2019.

**SA\*\*** is the first chamber music festival exclusively for string instrumentalists in Oaxaca, Mexico. Founded by SMTD's Amatista Quartet, in partnership with the Fine Arts School and the Fonoteca Juan León Mariscal - Centro Cultural San Pablo, SA' creates strong pedagogical experiences for underprivileged students in Mexico while providing U-M students the opportunity to develop their professional careers.

**The Third Place Concert Series** is an Ann Arbor-based presenter which fosters community-building by presenting cross-genre performances at a variety of local venues. They recently expanded their series with the three-day Third Place Chamber Fest, which featured dozens of Michigan students and SE Michigan-based artists.

\* **2018-19 EXCEerator Fellows**



*"I can't stress how thankful I am for having had this unique opportunity; it really was a game changer."*

**Michelle Popa** (BM '20, voice)  
NYC Immersion participant, arts management track





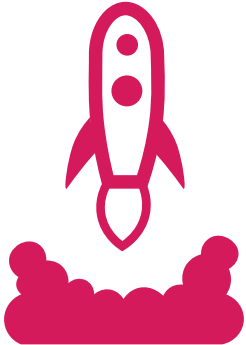
# NUMBERS<sup>AT A</sup> GLANCE



*Princeton Review/Entrepreneurship Magazine* ranks the University of Michigan's Entrepreneurship network, of which EXCEL is a member, as one of the best in the nation – **#1** undergraduate and **#8** graduate (as of fall 2019).

## STUDENT ENGAGEMENT 2018-19

These student engagement figures represent the number of U-M students who have participated in EXCEL Talks and courses.



Events  
Held

54

Unique  
Students

658

Overall  
Attendance

1,223

20

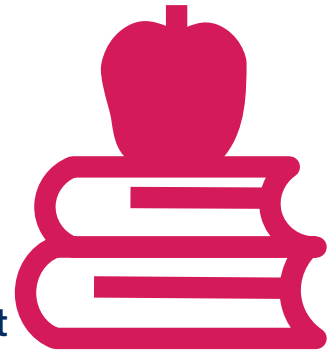
Courses  
Available

374

Students  
Enrolled

18.7

Average  
Enrollment



**EXCEL  
NUMBERS  
TO-DATE**

As of August 1, 2019



EXCEL  
TALKS **167**

Sessions  
hosted

**\$345K**

Awarded to  
students



MENTORSHIP

**1,170**

Counseling Sessions

## '18-19 DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDS

**316**

Students  
Funded

**109**

Funded Projects &  
Internships

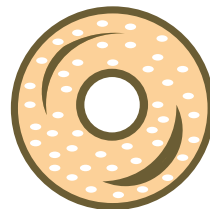
**24**

Areas  
Represented\*



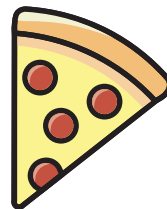
\*Winds & Percussion (23), Strings (22), Theatre & Drama (18), Composition (14), LSA (13), Dance (12), Musical Theatre (8), Piano (7), Voice (6), Conducting (5), Music Education (5), Engineering (4), Jazz (4), PAT (4), Chamber Music (3), Musicology (2), InterArts (2), Piano Pedagogy (2), EXCEL (1), Public Health (1), Ross (1), Social Work (1), Stamps (1), and Taubman (1)

## AT OUR COLLABORATIVE EVENTS STUDENTS SHARED



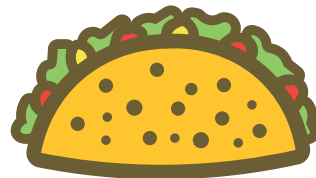
**234**

Bagels




**78**

Pizzas



**600**

Tacos

A woman with dark hair, wearing a striped blouse, is seated at a wooden desk in a library, looking down at a document. A man in a white shirt is leaning over her, pointing at the same document. The desk has a laptop, a lamp, and some papers. Bookshelves filled with books are in the background.

*"It is because of the EXCEerator Fellowship that we were able to make LAMI a reality. We had many ideas and dreams but it was this Fellowship that gave us the tools to make LAMI come true."*

**Maria Castillo Rodríguez** (Specialist '19, flute)  
LAMI (p. 18)

**EXCEL Lab Team:** Mark Clague, associate dean for undergraduate academic affairs; Jonathan Kuuskoski, director; Caitlin Taylor, coordinator; Melissa Coppola, program assistant; Gala Flagello, program assistant; Michele Ripka, program assistant; Aviva Klein, dean's liaison

The information listed in this brochure is accurate as of August 1, 2019.

Please visit [smtd.umich.edu/excel](https://smtd.umich.edu/excel) for the most up-to-date information about the EXCEL Lab.

**Photo Credits:** Cover: Maya Elena Photography (Runyonland Productions); p.1 Colin McCall (DEI/EXCEL Expo); p.4 Maya Ballester (Front Porch); p.5 Kyle Prue (Vincent Ford Jr.); p.7 Joseph Rybarczyk (Elise Eden); p.8 David Gutiérrez (SA); p.11 Colin McCall (EXCELebration); p.13 Akropolis Reed Quintet (Kari Landry & class); p.14 Estefanía Cano (Victoria Briones); p.16 Kaleigh Wilder (Third Place); p.17 Joshua Knoller (Hayley Tibbenham); p.18 Kyle Prue (Carrli Cooper); p.19 Bethany Louria (Michelle Popa); Back Cover: Danielle Gonzalez (LAMI)

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