



COURTESY OF CITY YEAR

Daniel Becton '08 spoke to City Year's staff teams and representatives from City Year South Africa at the nonprofit's Summer Leadership Academy in Boston. "When you owe somebody a debt," he told the audience, "you have a power gap. When you're repaying debt, you are diminishing power. When you're repaying *kindness*, you're expanding love. ... Love works, and love multiplies. Love keeps growing."

## On the Road to Understanding

In the five years since **Daniel Becton** '08 graduated from Carolina, he has had many opportunities to see how readily the world can become an us-versus-them kind of place. For the past year, he's been leveraging much of what he learned at UNC — from finishing Phi Beta Kappa with a degree in philosophy and music and a minor in women's studies — to create different kinds of opportunities.

At the heart of his project are the teachings of an African belief system known as ubuntu. Beginning in August 2012, Becton spent roughly a week in each of the 50 states and Washington, D.C., engaged in activities designed to break down the walls often erected between different groups of people, whether due to race, religion, gender, income bracket or something else.

### Cross-country project promotes value of service, understanding

Predicated on fostering a sense of community, working toward the common good and respecting one another's differences, ubuntu defines what Becton hopes to achieve with his aptly named Ubuntu Project.

"The word is directly translated from a Zulu proverb," he said. "The idea is that my humanity is tied to yours. ... It's not only about the fact that I suffer when others suffer but also that I feel joy when others are happy.

"I am looking specifically at instances of people helping other people," he said. "I believe in every single community there are people helping other people, and that goes past economic conditions; it goes past money; and it certainly transcends votes."

In each state, Becton visited a single community where he would carry out

service-oriented activities — he conducted leadership workshops for incarcerated youth in Texas, taught elementary students about music in California and helped rebuild flooded homes in North Dakota.

He hopes to write a book. Along the way, he's created videos, blog posts and other kinds of content that, as he says, "celebrate" the ubuntu-like work that's taking place nationwide.

Becton believes no one should be defined by labels, including race and ethnicity, or by perceived defects, such as a physical disability. Instead, "we are all this remarkably complex, unique, wonderful collection of everything that's ever happened to us."

Becton grew up in Chapel Hill, where at a young age he respected diversity and became interested in social justice, but he says it wasn't until he enrolled at Carolina

that he developed an understanding of just how multifaceted the world could be.

“Being at UNC was the first time I escaped the bubble of Chapel Hill and became a lot more open to political diversity,” he said. “Because I’m so interested in moving past being right and wrong and looking at what really works, I noticed that liberal elitism doesn’t work, and getting outside of that bubble was something that only happened because I went to a public school that valued diversity.”

UNC also afforded him the opportunity to explore many interests. He played in several musical groups, participated in mock trials, was a member of the Undergraduate Honor Court and was editor of *Lambda Magazine*. As an undergrad, he also led tours for prospective students and worked at *The Chapel Hill News*.

After graduation, Becton volunteered with City Year San Jose in California and then went to England, where he worked for City Year London and received a master’s degree in gender studies from the London School of Economics. Now that his U.S. tour has ended, he plans to go back to school to study theology and public policy.

Questions of faith, he says, often create the most severe us-versus-them divides. One of the biggest problems in the U.S., he said, “is that people of faith and people who are not of faith both think, ‘We are loving, but they are hateful,’ and we don’t recognize that the other is also coming from a place of love. We somehow think we have a monopoly on love.”

Becton says that when he was a child, he wanted to have the superpower of being able to know what made someone happy. Through his travels, he says, he’s learned that simply loving people — listening, helping and appreciating others for who they are — makes a difference.

Now he’s focused on the next thing he’d like to figure out: “How do we harness and leverage good will? How do we mobilize kindness? How do we mobilize love? Because it has an infinite return on investment.”

— Lucy Hood '83



**ONLINE:**

For more on Becton’s work and on his Ubuntu Project, see [projectubuntu.info](http://projectubuntu.info).

## New Address? One email to the GAA updates your University record.

[alumni@unc.edu](mailto:alumni@unc.edu)

Your GAA. Serving Carolina and our students—past, present and future.



GENERAL ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

## Waking up is hard to do. Especially when you dread going to work.



If you **haven't found your dream job**, perhaps it's time to stop snoozing and revive your career goals.

Whether you want to make a **career change** or just need **career advice**, the GAA's Alumni Career Services can help.

**Not in Chapel Hill?  
Not a problem.**  
Most of our services are available by phone or email.

Visit [alumni.unc.edu/career](http://alumni.unc.edu/career) or contact Linda Conklin, the GAA's manager of Alumni Career Services, at (919) 962-3749 or [linda\\_conklin@unc.edu](mailto:linda_conklin@unc.edu), to get your career moving today.



GENERAL ALUMNI ASSOCIATION