

2020 Distinguished Alumna and Alumnus Award Recipients University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Anubha Anand, BA 1995

Anu Anand is a graduate of the Hussman School of Journalism and Media who is being recognized for excellence in the field of journalism. She currently serves as the host of Marketplace Morning Report on the BBC World Service, a global business program produced jointly by Marketplace and the BBC. She has spent 20 years in international news for the BBC World Service, as well as working for The Guardian, Al Jazeera and other major news organizations.

She graduated from UNC hoping to see the world and tell the stories of places she didn't know, which she has done to an extraordinary degree. Ms. Anand has traveled to many countries, including Iraq, Afghanistan, Mongolia, Tanzania, Myanmar, Egypt, Israel and Uruguay for her work and has hosted live audience debate shows in the United States, France, India and Nepal. She's reported on the important stories of government, the challenging stories of cultural change and the small stories of people and places that bring insight into the every day.

This year, Ms. Anand received the Asian Women of Achievement Award (Media) for her many years of global reporting in her native India and around the world. She pledged to use the award to create a more diverse pipeline of talent at the BBC World Service and to work to raise awareness of thalassemia, the genetic blood disorder that affects more than 100 million people around the world, largely concentrated in Mediterranean and South Asian countries.

Francis Collins, MD 1977

Francis Collins has distinguished himself in the field of medical science. Serving as director of the NIH since 2009, he is credited with being one of the agency's most influential leaders. Prior to joining the NIH, he directed the Human Genome Project, work that prompted his nominator to write that "It is impossible to overestimate the importance of Francis Collins' contribution to humankind as director of the international Human Genome Project. His leadership of the first full sequencing of human DNA constitutes 'the work of the century.'" In addition, over the course of his career, Dr. Collins's research laboratory has discovered a number of important genes, including those responsible for cystic fibrosis, neurofibromatosis and Huntington's disease. High level recognition for his contributions to science include the Presidential Medal of Freedom and the National Medal of Science.

He is the author of New York Times bestseller *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* and other books on science, medicine and religion. He founded and presided over the BioLogos Foundation, which promotes discourse on the relationship between science and religion.

Finally, Dr. Collins has been a strong advocate for protecting the privacy of genetic information and has served as a national leader in the passage of the federal Genetic Information and Nondiscrimination Act, which prohibits gene-based discrimination in employment and health insurance.

Mary K. Estes, PhD 1972

Mary Estes has made invaluable impacts in virology and microbiology, the field in which she received her doctorate from Carolina. She is the Distinguished Service Professor of Virology and Microbiology and Cullen Foundation Endowed Chair at the Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, Texas. Dr. Estes also serves as the co-director of the Translational Biology and Molecular Medicine Graduate Program and is a member of the Dan L. Duncan Comprehensive Cancer Center.

Her research on the two most common viruses that cause devastating human diarrhea (rotavirus and norovirus) has markedly advanced our understanding of these viruses and has generated valuable contributions to the treatment and prevention of life-threatening diarrhea throughout the world. Most recently, she has used genetic approaches and developed new assays that have changed our understanding of the natural history of these unforgiving microorganisms. Her lab solved the first crystallographic structure of a calicivirus and is using this information to help develop vaccines for the prevention of life-threatening diseases in people with immune deficiencies and in children. Put more simply, as one nominator wrote, anyone who has experienced a “stomach bug” can appreciate her work.

Dr. Estes is a member of the National Academy of Sciences and the Academy of Medicine, Engineering and Science of Texas. Among many other honors, she received the American Gastroenterological Association (AGA) Distinguished Achievement Award in 2010.

Daniel Patterson, MA 1955, PhD 1959

Daniel W. Patterson is considered a giant in the field of Folklore. He revived and revitalized Carolina's highly esteemed academic Folklore program, laid the foundation for the nation's largest archive of southern traditional song and folklife, mentored countless undergraduate and graduate students over more than three decades of teaching and pioneered an ethic of community-based collaboration and public-facing scholarship that continues to define UNC's Folklore Program to this day. He is the author of nine books and editor of two collections that feature work by his graduate students.

Descended from generations of North Carolinians, Dr. Patterson started collecting rare old songs from elderly relatives after receiving a tape recorder for his 1949 Duke University graduation. His passion for collecting—and, more importantly, for interpreting and presenting those gathered materials to broader publics—became hallmarks of his long career at UNC, where he earned both a master's and doctoral degree in English. In all of his scholarship, he connected minutely observed aesthetic expression with specific (mostly) Southern histories and characters. Folklore for Dr. Patterson connects past and present in ways that bring skill and motivation to life.

Dr. Patterson's celebrated career as scholar and teacher has been marked by many accolades over the years. In 1980, the NC Folklore Society awarded him the Brown-Hudson Folklore Prize for his "significant contributions to the transmission, appreciation and observance of traditional culture and folklife in North Carolina." He has been a Fellow at the National Humanities Center, the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Study and Conference Center and the American Folklore Society. In 2009, Dr. Patterson received the Society's prestigious Kenneth Goldstein Award for Lifetime Academic Leadership.

Joel R. “Peter” Skillern, MCRP 1991

A 1991 graduate of the Department of City and Regional Planning, Peter Skillern was nominated in recognition of a career dedicated to creatively and effectively addressing poverty and inequality in North Carolina and the nation. He currently serves as the executive director of Durham-based Reinvestment Partners, an innovative nonprofit advocacy and community development agency that works with people, places and policy to promote economic justice and opportunity. Among other activities, it advocates for reforms in the lending industry with the intent of improving conditions for lower-income borrowers. The agency has won numerous accolades and is considered a state and national leader in community economic development.

Mr. Skillern has won major consumer protections and fair lending commitments worth billions of dollars while also promoting and protecting the ability of low-income families and neighborhoods to build wealth. In recognition of his leadership, he was selected as a William Friday Fellow for Human Relations and as an Eisenhower Fellow for International Relations.

Because his advocacy is based on factual research and well-reasoned policy, Mr. Skillern garners respect by those in the banking, government and regulatory sector. His expertise has earned him invitations to speak before the House of Representatives and Senate Banking Committees of the United States Congress on issues of financial practices and policy reforms. He also served on the HUD/Treasury Task Force on Predatory Lending. He meets regularly with leadership of the Federal Reserve Bank, Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, the FDIC and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

Marla Smith-Nilson, MS 1994

Environmental Sciences and Engineering alumna Marla Smith-Nilson is notable for her positive impact on water and sanitation initiatives across the globe. Over her 25-year career, her work has brought clean water and sanitation to hundreds of thousands of people in Latin America, Asia and Africa. She is the founder and executive director of Water 1st International, which helps poor communities build and independently maintain water supply and sanitation systems. Using this platform, Ms. Smith-Nilson has implemented almost 2,000 water systems in four countries.

She remains steadfast in her philosophy that a grassroots connection is essential to every project. Her projects always include local partner organizations staffed with local specialists in engineering, community development and public health education. Water, sanitation and hygiene education are integrated to maximize health benefits. Communities are empowered to solve their own water supply and sanitation problems, helping to ensure longevity and sustainability of solutions.

Ms. Smith-Nilson's work in water began as a master's student in public health when she co-founded WaterPartners International (now water.org) with a fellow master's student. Since then, she has distinguished herself as both an excellent engineer and as a great humanitarian. Countless people live better lives today because of her work.

Nominated by Dean Barbara Rimer, Gillings School of Global Public Health; and Professor and Chair Barbara Turpin, Environmental Sciences and Engineering.