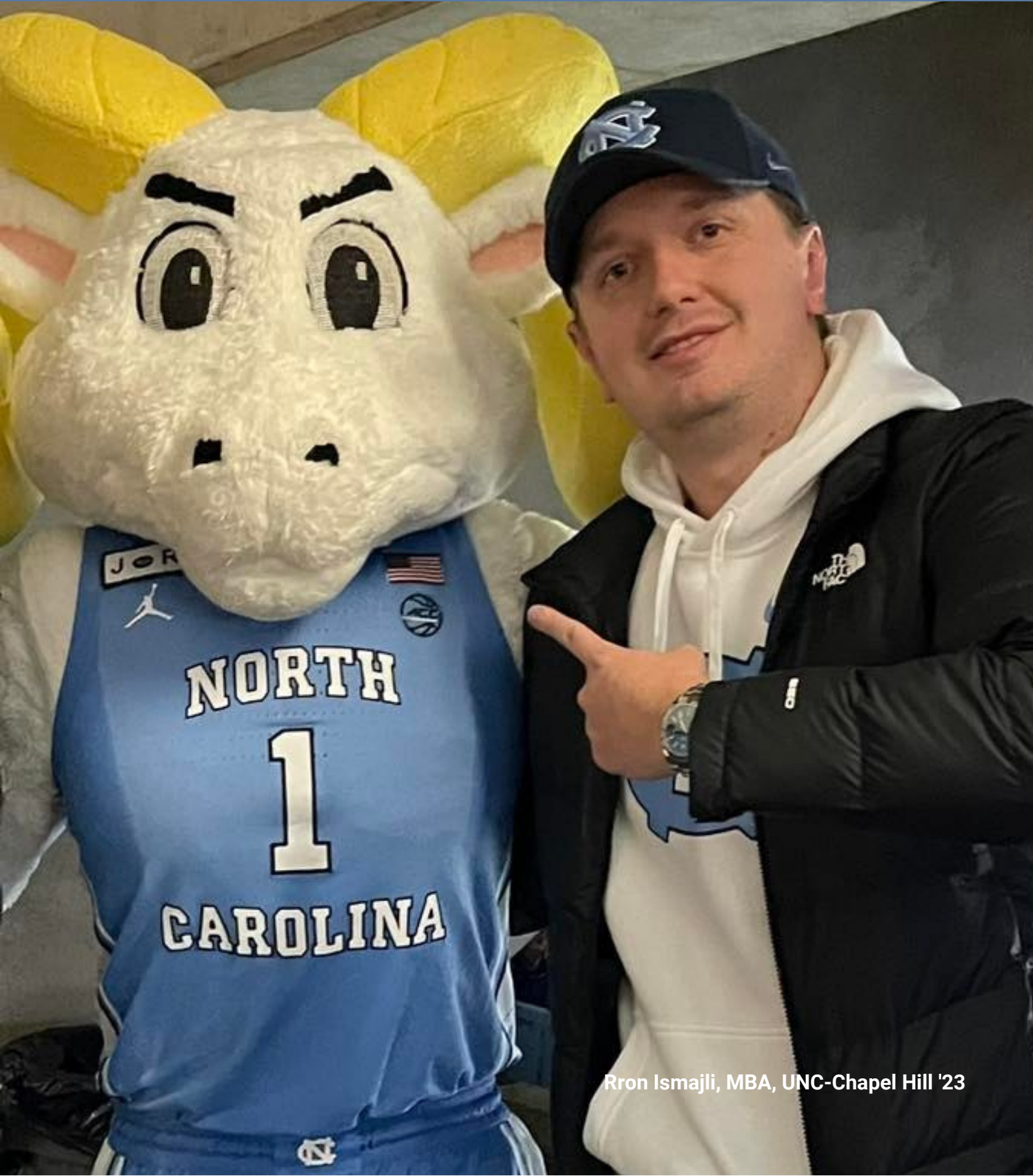


# Kosovo American Education Fund

## Quarterly Newsletter, September 2022



Rron Ismajli, MBA, UNC-Chapel Hill '23

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## Updates from KAEF Fellows

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**Festa Stavileci** (LL.M., Duke University, '23) - My first month in the United States has been a balanced combination of studies, accommodation, and fun with my peers from the LLM program. With such a busy and rewarding agenda, there was no time to even get homesick.

To begin with, the renowned lecturers at Duke Law have managed to make the classrooms pleasant places to be. Most professors follow a practical approach to studies, encouraging discussion on pertinent topics of law, such that it is impossible not to engage in discussions. One aspect that is particularly distinct from legal education in Kosovo, is the individualistic approach to learning. This aspect, I think, is ingrained in the American culture, as it is reflected in several routine activities

Duke Law embodies the values of helping out one another, embracing diversity, and it is built upon a foundation of ethical rules, which it zealously protects. These values are also embraced by the Duke staff and alumni, who are always present and willing to help the current students.

Despite living in the quiet city of Durham, I am lucky to be surrounded by a diverse and accomplished LLM cohort, who liven up my experience here. Not only are these fellows intellectually driven, but they are also very fun. We have had the chance to experience American football and its unique atmosphere, taste some of the traditional desserts of my peers' home countries, visit the beautiful golf courses in North Carolina, and volunteer in public service.

These enriching activities have broadened my view of the different communities in the world, including, of course, the American culture. With the international week approaching, I will be able to showcase the cultural values of Kosovo as well, as many students have shown interest in learning more about our country.

I noticed that Americans operate in a way that is different from many countries. The differences are noticeable starting from the unique measurement units they use, to the their opinions in controversial topics. Studying the US Constitution exposes me to Americans' different opinions and approaches toward absolute freedom of speech, or the right to bear arms. While some of these thoughts are often contradicting the thoughts I grew up with, it is very interesting to be exposed to such opinions.

All in all, a month has been more than enough for me to recognize the tremendous impact this journey will have in my life. I also recognize that this opportunity would not have been possible without the support of KAEF. Experiences like this one are invaluable, and they do not come so often. I would encourage every student in Kosovo to apply for a Master's degree in the US and utilize this amazing opportunity given to us by KAEF. You will not regret it!

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# Updates from KAEF Fellows

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**Rina Bulliqi** (MBA, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, '24) - The decision to apply for the KAEF fellowship is one of those decisions I know I will never regret. As an aspiring entrepreneur, I knew that obtaining an MBA from a top university in the United States would benefit my growth immensely, both professionally and personally.

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has been nothing short of a positive experience with both staff and faculty going above and beyond to make us students feel welcomed, motivated, and prepared for every step of our academic journey. Being part of a rigorous STEM MBA program is rewarding, but also demanding. Fortunately, the university offers countless recourses, whether it is through the academic staff, student clubs, tutors, or even the administrative staff. As an international student that has never lived outside of Kosovo before an MBA, I find tremendous value in these behind-the-scenes efforts towards my success in the program.

Apart from academics, this experience has enriched my network as well. In the short two months that I have been here, I have had the opportunity to make friends from several parts of the world. Each day I learn something new about a different culture. I am confident that what I get to learn by natives of different countries is far more than I would have learned from any book or movie. Similarly, I get teach my peers about Kosovo, our people, and our culture. I can't help but feel a proud moment whenever someone hits me up with a random fact they saw about Kosovo or when they try to blurt something in Albanian.

I am excited about all the experiences coming my way in the next two years, and I cannot recommend the program enough to anyone looking for a similar experience. If you are considering to apply, do it – but take it seriously. One advice I can share with future applicants and fellows is to take time and work on your storytelling skills. You will need them during the application process and the fellowship.

For future applicants, speaking from personal experience, “winging it” may get you past a couple of rounds. However, the ability to connect your experiences and expectations with your personal statement and interview questions is what I found to be a determining factor for a successful outcome of the KAEF application. This is where storytelling comes into play. Fortunately, KAEF provides a generous timeframe in terms of application, so even if this is an entirely new concept, anyone can nail it down in a couple of months.

For future fellows, I am going to share a couple of (amusing) culture shocks that you may or may not experience if it is your first time in the U.S.:

- Food portions are big and It is tough to find dishes that resemble our local food.
- Unlike our condensed cities in Kosovo, it is tough to get anywhere without a car so keep transportation in mind when hunting for apartments.
- U.S. college culture is very influenced by sports. Apart from everybody following the college teams during game season, you will come to see that almost EVERYBODY does some kind of sport themselves. For me, this has served as a source of motivation.
- There's usually no music in bars and events. You will be talking to everyone all the time, and you will be making a lot of friends this way.
- You will actually miss having someone to talk to in Albanian.

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# Updates from KAEF Fellows

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**Rron Ismajli** (MBA, UNC-Chapel Hill '23) - My decision to apply for the KAEF Scholarship came both as a result of a lifelong aspiration for studying abroad as well as of professional necessity. As I was nearing my fourth year working as a consultant for a Big Four company in Kosovo, I felt that I had reached a roadblock in terms of career advancement into senior managerial roles within the industry. Naturally, the next logical step was to pursue an MBA that would equip me with the appropriate skills for further personal development. While researching all the prospects available in Kosovo, it was easy for me to pick KAEF because of the top-notch education opportunities it provides to its cohorts as well as the overwhelmingly positive feedback I had received from past Fellows. That all proved to be true, as my experience as a KAEF Fellow has been enriching in all aspects. From my targeted placement at the Kenan-Flagler Business School to the incredible network of the Alumni Association back in Kosovo, KAEF provides a comprehensive program that has impacted me career-wise well beyond the academic facet itself.

As I am entering the final year of my studies and starting to reflect on my U.S. experience, I would say that the most valuable component that I have gained from this program is the array of like-minded people I have interacted with during the past dozen months. Privileges such as making friends that will be my future points of contact around the globe or witnessing groundbreaking research that UNC Faculty is working on have only been possible thanks to KAEF. Needless to say, the practical approach for which the American education system is renowned has also been quite helpful in fostering a wide scope of skills in various areas such as capital markets, project management, and even public speaking.

Having been in the U.S. before and knowing its culture thoroughly since a young age, I have not come across into any major culture shock so far. With that being said, I have noticed several small albeit meaningful social differences between myself as a foreign student and my American colleagues. For example, group assignments here typically contain constructive peer criticism in order to challenge each member to outdo themselves as opposed to accommodating for fear of losing squad cohesiveness. This is something I really appreciate because it makes for a pleasant teambuilding exercise and the resulting outcome is better than anticipated.

To conclude, my phenomenal experience in the U.S. as a KAEF Fellow gives me confidence in encouraging all those eligible for applying to do so because it truly is a life-changing experience for the better. Being part of this program, and the school it places, not only provides great credentials for future employment but also allows Fellows to experience a different system of attaining and applying knowledge than that typically found in Kosovo.

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## An Event Honoring KAEF Alumni Contributions

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On June 26th, the Kosovo American Education Fund organized an event to celebrate and honor its alumni and their contributions to Kosovo's economic development.

Kosovo's Prime Minister, Mr. Albin Kurti, and USAID Kosovo Mission Director, Ms. Zeinah Salahi, were among the keynote speakers who addressed the guests, comprised of program alumni, fellows, committee members, and senior representatives from Kosovo's private and public institutions.

The highlight of the event was the announcement and the signing ceremony of the pledges through which the KAEF alumni committed to offer their expertise, pro-bono, to Kosovo's government and its institutions. These commitments were solemnly handed over to the Prime Minister of Kosovo, Mr. Albin Kurti, from the President of the KAEF Alumni Association, Ms. Erëza Gjikolli.

The KAEF community is thankful to its friends and supporters, and is looking forward to this partnership for the betterment of Kosovo.

Kosovo American Education Fund (KAEF) represents one of the most prestigious higher education programs in Kosovo, providing graduate fellowships for master's level study at leading U.S. universities. The program aims to empower the future leaders of Kosovo with the knowledge and tools needed to promote the country's economic development. To date, through a competitive and merit-based process, the KAEF program has awarded over 110 graduate scholarships to talented Kosovars to study at over 40 U.S. universities, who then return home to make an impactful contribution via the private and public sectors.



**Learn more: [kaef-online.org](https://www.kaef-online.org)**

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