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Nearly 100 Tar Heel students filed into the Carolina Union on Saturday morning prepared to hone leadership skills and tackle big challenges facing our society. The Bell Leadership Symposium was an all-day experience hosted by Carolina Union's Office of Student Life & Leadership, with speakers and workshops designed to boost mastery of leadership.

With a goal of encouraging and empowering students to be the change they want to see in the world through leadership development and social innovation, the theme of this year's symposium was Next Level: Achieving Carolina Excellence.

Dr Gerald D. Bell, founder and President of and CEO of the Bell Leadership Institute, kicked the day off with a speech about the importance of effective and empathetic leadership.

"Extreme poverty, lack of education, lack of opportunities, lack of treating people with dignity will only be cured if we have highly effective human beings, who become highly effective leaders who build highly effective organizations," Dr. Bell said to open the symposium. "And that can be business, hospitals, music, athletics. You guys are the answer and the solution to the world's problems."

A record 93 students participated in the symposium, showing a heightened desire among UNC students to put leadership skills into practice. Among the attendees was Brynn Garner, a junior Environmental Studies and History double major. Garner said that she applied to the symposium because she had been taking on more leadership roles and wanted to be more effective leader to advance environmental causes of importance to her.

"There are so many environmental issues going on right now, and I just want to make an impact, Garner said. "This is my first step to being able to do those things. I am looking forward to connecting with other people interested in environmental issues because I often feel like we are divided and if we all come together then the impact we could have here at Carolina is incredible."

Abby Pearson is a sophomore Global Studies major who is also considering a Business Administration major. She heard about the Bell Leadership Symposium through the NC Fellows program, and was interested in learning about how leadership can affect issues of social change.

"I am hoping to reevaluate my own disposition on social change because I understand that if you are going about some kind of social change aspect, you can be one-sided because it is a societal focused thing, Pearson said. "I haven't experienced every marginalization that there is, so I'm hoping to hone in on that and re-evaluate my own bias."