



THE STEPHEN PHILLIPS MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP FUND

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APPLYING DESPITE ADVERSITY

This year, we want to highlight our applicants. Specifically, we want to celebrate the persistence of the over 1,000 new applicants who submitted applications for the Phillips Scholarship. We know that it took great effort and determination to navigate the scholarship process in a particularly difficult year!

In 2024, the process of completing college applications and figuring out how to finance college plans was harder than ever due to the rollout of the 'Better FAFSA'. A new Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form, congressionally mandated to expand access to federal financial aid, was delayed for months and plagued with technology glitches. The flawed launch left students in limbo, without the necessary information to determine which colleges they could afford to attend or which outside scholarships they were eligible for.

We extended our application deadline as we read article after article about FAFSA challenges bringing the form completion rate down, especially among low-income students and students of color. The latest data from the National College Attainment Network, tracking FAFSA completion through September, shows a 9% drop in completed forms from 2023 to 2024, with a larger drop of 10% at schools with high populations of low-income students and 'high minority' schools.

While we are disappointed by these national figures, we are pleased that so many students persevered to apply for our scholarship. Now, we are looking forward to a smoother FAFSA process in the coming year, and to supporting our 172 persistent new Phillips Scholars in their college journeys.

2024 By the Numbers



1,000+
new applicants



172 new
awards*



~\$1.5M in new
scholarships*



Over \$83M in
Phillips
Scholarships,
all-time

*These figures include 24 new recipients, whose awards are funded by donors as part of our named scholarships program.

ONE PHILLIPS SCHOLAR'S STORY OF PERSISTENCE

We know that each of our Phillips Scholars has their own story of persistence to tell. While the systemic challenges can look similar, the particulars are incredibly personal. Below, Samantha Cao, Babson College '24, generously shares her experience and what she learned along the way.

"Growing up in a poor immigrant household, I learned early on that every day would be a test of endurance, resilience, and commitment to a better future. As a kid, I spent most of my time in school, at after-school programs, or with family friends until my parents got off work from their 12+ hour restaurant jobs. My parents wanted me to focus on and excel in school. My mom was especially relentless on this facet as she had shared the same passion for learning as I did when she was a kid but due to financial reasons, she had to drop out of school and care for her younger siblings instead. She didn't want me to go down the same path as her. Eager to make my parents proud, I threw myself into academics, seeing it as a means to eventually provide a more stable life for my family.



However, this "path to success" wouldn't be as simple and straightforward as it seemed. When my parents opened their own restaurant during my middle school years, I found myself working weekends and school breaks, struggling to balance my studies with the demands of the family business. Despite the exhaustion and burnout, I persevered, learning to manage my time better and maintaining my focus on education. The challenges didn't end there. As I entered sophomore year, a move to a new school district in pursuit of better opportunities brought its own set of hurdles. As I navigated the pressures of a rigorous course load and college preparation, I was also balancing being my little sister's caretaker and working part-time jobs to help pay the bills. The Covid-19 pandemic added another layer of complexity to my journey, but it also brought unexpected blessings. I received an acceptance letter from Babson College along with a generous financial aid package, supplemented by the Stephen Phillips Memorial Scholarship. This support was crucial in making my college dreams a reality. I felt like I was taking my foot off the gas pedal and taking a step back to appreciate everything I had achieved so far.

However, my journey through college was far from smooth sailing. Family crises, including my mother's struggles with mental health and addiction, tested my resolve like never before. Despite these personal challenges, I found ways to stay connected to my passion for learning and my goals. I balanced my studies with on-campus jobs, extracurricular activities, and eventually secured a promising internship that led to a full-time job offer. Looking back, I realize that persistence isn't just about survival or achieving goals—it's a privilege that teaches valuable life lessons. To me, persistence means embracing obstacles, finding joy in small victories, and maintaining hope even in the darkest times. It's about strength, resilience, and living with purpose. While I'm proud of my achievements, I'm even more grateful for the perspective that persistence has given me—a deeper appreciation for life's journey and the determination to keep striving for a better future."

MEET THE 2024 ALUMNI LEGACY SCHOLARS

Through the generosity and support of former recipients and their families, we are able to continue to award new scholars each year through the Alumni Legacy Scholars Program. Alumni Legacy Scholars embody what it means to be a Phillips Scholar, in the legacy of the alumni that donate to this scholarship program. Alumni Legacy Scholars display academic excellence, a commitment to serving others and the community, a strong work ethic, and excellent character. Thank you for your continued generosity towards these students and our scholarship program.

Leslie Rodriguez completed her high school coursework at Henry Abbott Technical High School on the Culinary Arts track. Leslie's goal is to become a doctor, so she decided to make the most of her high school education and seek out opportunities outside of school that suited her interests and career goals. She joined a women interested in medical and engineering program, became a volunteer at her local hospital in Danbury, Connecticut assisting nurses, doctors, and patients, and attended a pre-college program for students going into the medical field. Leslie is now studying Biology at the University of Connecticut Storrs. She says, "Although I didn't get the opportunity to dive into learning about the health field as much as I wanted during school, this experience has taught me to have an open mind to try new paths and to stay determined and committed to reach my goals." During high school, Leslie was a member of Abbott Tech Awareness Group, a club that promotes diversity, inclusion, kindness, and awareness. She was also a long-time volunteer with Danbury Grassroots Academy, which allowed her to participate in a multitude of service activities for the local community.



Read about the rest of our Alumni Legacy Scholars on the next page

Phillips Le spent his time at St. John's Preparatory School in Massachusetts as a highly engaged member of the school community. He served as Vice President of the Latinos Unidos en Acción (L.U.N.A) organization, President of the Asian Cultural Club, and organized volunteering opportunities for fellow students as a PEER teen leader, which is a global volunteering organization. He was also selected to be a student advisor to his school's Multicultural Affairs and Cultural Development Office and played for the school's Varsity men's volleyball team. Phillips was an active member of his local community of Lawrence, volunteering with Cor Unum Meal Center preparing and serving hot meals, while talking with the locals, and with Lazarus House coordinating food drives, stocking the food pantry, and working in the thrift shop. He says, "Cor Unum has given me the chance to give back to the city that raised me... I think, through Cor Unum, I've learned to become a more accepting person who is grateful for the blessings in my life." Phillips is now studying Biomedical Engineering at Boston University with the goal of making a tangible difference in the lives of individuals and families dealing with chronic illnesses.



Emma Cook is currently studying Education at Marist College. Emma plans to graduate from the five-year master's program and complete a Special Education certificate. From there, she hopes to become an elementary school teacher and be equipped to teach any student, no matter their needs. During her high school experience at Lyme-Old Lyme High School in Connecticut, Emma provided preventative education about substance abuse through Reach, participated in community service events in National Honor Society, and contributed to empowering exercise experiences for younger students at Run Like a Girl. On the weekends, she also volunteered at her local soup kitchen serving meals and interacting with the families. Emma says, "...the lessons I learned while completing various community service acts have helped me stay positive and became the reason I have grown to love volunteering so much. Volunteering can have just as much of an impact on you as the people you are helping."



Blake Bishop has always had a love and fascination for animals. He is not only passionate about learning about animal behaviors but also learning how to care for these animals. Blake has hands on experience with animals through his own farm in Wells, Vermont. He gained experience in all aspects of the animals' lives including feeding, cleaning, medical care, and more. This year he even bred potbelly pigs and plans to breed goat kids and lambs this Spring. Blake now studies Animal Science on the pre-veterinary track at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. He says, "My life plan is to be a local veterinarian who works with large animals on area farms and exotic pets. Working with my rural community doing what I love will hopefully make my life complete." While in high school at Long Trail School, Blake participated in community events and fundraisers with National Honor Society and volunteered with the Food Cupboard.



Sidrah Khan is pursuing a degree in Biology at Emmanuel College with the goal of going to medical school. She says, "As a healthcare worker, making sure every patient is understood and respected is at the core of our work. There is a huge shortage of interpreters that are absolutely vital for proper healthcare and communication with social workers. I want to be able to advocate for those communities and use my linguistic skills to do so." Sidrah was able to gain some experience in the healthcare field volunteering and shadowing at a hospital in her local Concord, New Hampshire, community and working as a Licensed Nursing Assistant (LNA). During her time at Concord High School, Sidrah was a member of Be the Change multicultural club, Student Government, and Health Occupations Students of America.



WORDS OF THANKS

We are humbled by the generosity of the alumni, families, and partners of the scholarship listed below, who made donations from November 2023 through October 2024. Thank you for your commitment to making college more affordable and accessible for students across New England.

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