

2016 NEW LEADER SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

RICHARD D. BRIDGES, JR., 49, is currently a second year graduate student in the Public Health Master's Degree Program at San Jose State University. He graduated from San Francisco State, majoring in health education in 2014. His goal is to use his Master's Degree in Public Health to have an impact on others who have struggled with many of the same problems which led him to a "vicious cycle of recidivism, substance abuse, and hopelessness". While working full time and attending school, he has facilitated a bi-monthly group at a substance abuse treatment facility, working with those struggling with Hepatitis C. Richard spent his young adulthood in and out of the criminal justice system, ultimately turning to education in order to break the cycle. "I am compelled to be a champion for the betterment of humanity." is how he describes his own transcendence from addiction and hopelessness. This is Richard's third New Leader Scholarship.

DARIAN EPHERSON, 21, grew up in Inglewood, California a small predominantly black and Latino suburb of Los Angeles. Darian is spending this Fall in the UCDC program and plans to spend the Spring and Summer semesters in Paris and London via the Global Cities Urban Realities Program. She is drawn to academic research, particularly to "voter participation among communities of color". Her dream is to become a professor of political science and educate others about the "multiple systems of oppression within the American political system".

GABRIELLE FALZONE, 45, graduated from San Francisco State University in 2002 with a major in Psychology and a minor in Classics. She is currently attending U.C., Berkeley's Sociocultural MA/Ph.D. Program in the School of Education. Having centered her previous work on marginalized youth still in school or homeless, her current emphasis is youth of color who have been expelled from school. Using her own experience as a teenage runaway, she has been successful in developing programs for troubled homeless youth, incorporating her interest in Greek Mythology as part of a successful outreach approach. She graduated magna cum laude, was admitted to Psi Chi, the Golden Key Honor Society and to Phi Beta Kappa. Following her graduation, she attended New College's multicultural teaching program, acquiring three teaching credentials. Gabby taught in two different charter schools as well as fostering three teens prior to starting her graduate studies at Berkeley. She will begin preliminary data collection for her dissertation in Spring 2016, which will use a two-tiered, youth participatory action research study of formerly incarcerated youth in the Bay Area. She is the recipient of seven New Leader Scholarships.

J. GABRIEL FRALEY, 48, is in his senior year at San Francisco State University, majoring in Cell and Molecular Biology. Currently, he is conducting molecular biology research in the laboratory of a renowned San Francisco State University professor. He plans a future in Biomedical Sciences Research after earning a Ph.D with an emphasis on neurological disease and cancer. Prior to his entering SFSU, Gabriel was in the US Coast Guard and attended numerous community colleges in an attempt to determine his final area of concentration. As a teenager in a mixed race family, he became emotionally challenged, forcing him to drop out of high school but was later able to attain a GED. Despite his early life challenges, Gabriel has had a profound interest in biodiversity and was fascinated by nature in all of its aspects leading him to a deep interest in wilderness travel.

VICKY GOMEZ, 40, went to City College of San Francisco as a teenage mother, transferred to San Francisco State University in 1998 and majored in both La Raza Studies and Health Sciences. In 2002, she received her BA, and went on to earn a Master's degree there in Public Health in 2010. She is currently enrolled in UC Berkeley's Doctor of Public Health (DrPH) Program. A long time passionate advocate of health equity, she has been working as a researcher on colorectal-cancer screening in the Latino Community at Kaiser Permanente. She applied for and was awarded a NIH Research Grant to Promote Diversity in Health Related Research. Vicky is now a mentor for numerous programs including Graduate Students of La Raza mentoring program and Getting Into Graduate School Program. Currently, she mentors four students helping them with graduate school applications and also with difficult life situations. Vicky received a previous New Leader Scholarship as an undergraduate in 2002. This is her fifth New Leader Scholarship.

SEDERIC GRANT, 24, graduated from UC, Berkeley, with a major in Public Health and is committed to becoming a dentist, working with underserved populations. Coming from a family of seven, whose mother died when he was nine, Sederic was raised in Foster Care through high school. While in foster care, he involved himself in campus leadership and athletics, continuing to pursue these same interests on the Berkeley campus. While at Cal, he was active in the Upward Bound Program and mentored both middle and high school students as well as participating in the UC Black Recruitment and Retention Center. He is focused on the dilemma of foster care youth "ageing out" at age 18 and losing their Medicaid coverage. Though planning to become a dentist, he is still intent on addressing this seriously neglected problem. Last year, Sederic was a Research Assistant at Highland County Hospital in Oakland, gathering and analyzing data in the Emergency Department. The summer before, he studied Physics at the University of Sussex in order to strengthen his background in the health sciences and this past year he was enrolled in an academic preparatory program for dentistry. He is now enrolled in dental school at UC, San Francisco. This is his third New Leader Scholarship.

NAZINEEN KHANDAHARI, 21, and her family came to the US from Afghanistan, fleeing the Soviet-Afghan war and the cultural persecution in Iran. She is in her senior year at UC, Berkeley with a double major in Public Health and Molecular & Cell Biology with an emphasis on infectious diseases. Nazneen's goal is to obtain a medical degree and work as a public health advocate, researcher and physician. She is currently working at Kaiser as a research assistant to help investigate cancer screening disparities in the faith-based Latino community. Another current scholar in the New Leader Scholarship Program(completing her Dr.PH Degree), has become her mentor and is a strong believer in Nazineen's potential. This has led to Nazineen's becoming an assistant to our other scholar, Vicky Gomez, in the cancer screening research project at Kaiser.

ANGEL KU, 26, graduated from San Francisco State University in 2012 with a BS degree in Cell and Molecular Biology. As an undocumented student, Angel and his family have faced numerous serious challenges in everyday survival. “My morning walks to the bus station for my commute to San Francisco State (are) always accompanied with the fear of having my future and family taken from me.” His deep commitment to his community and his indomitable focus on academic achievement have resulted in goals that merge his love of science with his commitment to community action. Angel aspires to become a research scientist in order to address the limitations of modern medicine to alleviate health disparities. Furthermore, Angel seeks to mentor other students in the biomedical sciences through his work with Pre-Health Dreamers. As an undergraduate, he was President and Student Organizer for IDEAS to achieve legislation to help undocumented students move into higher education. That work has taken a new form through his leadership in the “Pre-Dreamers Project” which advocates and prepares undocumented students across the nation for future careers in the health sciences with the goal of affecting health disparities. He has combined his interest in public health with functional genomics and become better able to understand how molecular biology can be applied to advancing the understanding of human disease. He is in his third year of a doctoral program in Pharmaceutical Sciences and Pharmacogenomics at UCSF. This is his fifth New Leader Scholarship.

JIRAYUT LATTHIVONGSKORN, 27, graduated from UC, Berkeley with a major in Molecular and Cell Biology four years ago. He came to the United States with his parents as an undocumented 9-year-old immigrant from Thailand. Jirayut (New) has experienced first hand the alienation and confusion immigrant families face during health crises, resulting in his passion to become a physician. Last year he became the first undocumented immigrant to be accepted into medical school at UCSF. With his awareness of how cultural competency affects health disparities, he became committed to bridging that distance between patients and their medical care. Given his life experiences, New became active in the immigrant rights movement, speaking publicly and writing of his experiences. He felt that “Helping millions like myself made the risk of deportation worth taking”. New has served as Co-Chair of “Asian Students Promoting Immigrant Rights Through Education” (ASPIRE) where he’s been an extremely effective advocate for DREAM Act- related legislation to help immigrants attend college. He, along with other students, created a national organization, The Pre-Health Dreamers Project. The intent behind its creation was to prepare undocumented students for careers in the health sciences in order to impact health disparities. New was awarded the 2015 UCSF Chancellor’s Award for Service and the Thomas N. Burbidge Award; both awards recognize students for their work in public service that goes beyond their area of training. He currently serves as an appointee on President Napolitano’s Advisory Group on Undocumented Students. This is New’s fourth New Leader Scholarship.

ROBERTO MONICO, 39, graduated from UC, Berkeley with a degree in Sociology, minoring in Ethnic Studies. He received his AA degree from Los Angeles City College. Roberto grew up with a widowed mother, the youngest of four siblings, two of whom faced severe health problems. Realizing the degree to which his mother was affected by her immigrant status, advocating for immigrant rights is a major concern of his. He was a re-entry student and received scholarships both through the Osher Re-Entry Program as well as the McNair scholarship Program. Roberto is also a member of the Underground Scholars Initiative, a student group on campus “for students that have been affected by the prison industrial complex”. This has led him to the long term goal of acquiring a Ph.D. in order to research the issues that formerly incarcerated people face in re-entering society. The Alpha Kappa Delta Society, an honor society in sociology, has awarded him membership. Roberto is currently enrolled in the Master’s Degree program in the college of Ethnic Studies. This is his second New Leader Scholarship.

CARLOS MACIAS PRIETO, 34, was born in Nochistlan, Zacatecas, Mexico and immigrated to the United States with his family when he was ten years old. He received his BA degree from UC, Berkeley in 2007 and his Master’s degree in American Studies from Purdue in 2011. He is currently in the PhD. Program in Spanish and Portuguese at Berkeley. This Fall, he passed his qualifying examination in the nahuatl language, an important aspect of his scholarly research. Over the years, Carlos has shown an incredible passion and commitment to helping disadvantaged students whose original language was not English become proficient in writing. He has been a tutor in a low-income high school in Oakland and at Laney Community College. At UC, Berkeley, Carlos has tutored students in the Student Learning Center, taught in the Summer Bridge Program, and served as a coordinator for the Starting Point Mentorship Program. He has devoted himself to becoming a reader for scholarship applications in several programs and has offered workshops on graduate school application to New Leader Scholars. Carlos is passionate about becoming a professor in a leading academic university in order to merge his scholarly and research interests with those of serving disadvantaged students. This is his fifth New Leader Scholarship.

NATALIE RUIZ, 24, is a senior at UC, Berkeley, whose goal is to earn a joint Ph.D in Sociology and Masters in Public Policy. In particular, she plans to do policy research and advocate on behalf of student parents, concentrating her efforts on those parents who attend community college as a first step to a four-year college degree. She currently is working as a program director for the Student Parent Food Assistance program, bringing much needed food donations to low-income student parent families. She admires her grandparents who came to this country as Braceros and worked tirelessly in the agricultural fields surrounding Stockton. Her grandfather’s dream was to become an engineer but died with a 6th grade education, remaining a hero in her life. This summer, Natalie interned at the California State Senate under Senator Hannah-Beth Jackson.

JANELLI VALLIN, 21, is a senior at UC, Berkeley and a Pre-Med Major with an emphasis in Public Health. While in high school, she began studying Mandarin, a language which she has continued to study in college. She is also fluent in Spanish and uses both of these languages in her multiple volunteer capacities. While at the Center for Public Health Practice, she participated in advocacy work that helped put a warning label on the content in beverages. Janelli’s approach is firmly rooted in a holistic belief concerning the importance of having a public health perspective in the practice of medicine. This summer, she interned at Smile Angel’s Children’s Hospital in Beijing in order to learn medical Mandarin terminology while also shadowing surgeons that corrected cleft palate abnormalities.