



NEW LEADER SCHOLAR BIOS 2011

MELISSA BARKER, 29, is an Interdisciplinary Studies Major in her senior year at U.C., Berkeley. A single mother, Melissa's work, challenging access to education for single mothers on welfare, has taken her to U.C., Berkeley's Women's Empowerment Symposium. As a result of being a panelist there, she was invited to the Clinton Global Initiative University and most recently went to Washington, D.C. as a participant in the Institute of Women's Policy Research. She hopes to attend law school in order to study Public Interest and Policy Law. Her inspirations are her brother, who succumbed to leukemia at age 19, and her daughter, who continues to inspire Melissa's commitment to succeed.

MEGAN BLANCHARD, a U.C., Berkeley senior, draws from her background as an adopted child in a multiethnic family to shape her aspirations and commitment to improving communities and individuals struggling against the obstacles of poverty and lack of opportunity. Realizing that her opportunities in life would have been significantly different if she were not adopted, Megan decided to use her education to enrich her ethnic identity and understanding with the goal of being a social change agent. In addition to the honors she's received, including being named a McNair Scholar, Megan has volunteered in New Orleans's Lower-Ninth Ward, mentored exchange students and started a community service organization in her department, the Black Sociological Alliance. Growing up in a racially diverse family gave her tremendous insight and perspective which she takes with her this Fall to study in Washington, D.C.

STEPHANIE CHIRI, 24, is a senior at San Francisco State University where she is working on a Bachelor's in Child and Adolescent Development. Her aspirations include getting a Master's in Special Education and a Ph.D. in Social Work. Her goal is to create her own nonprofit in order to help disadvantaged families who have children with disabilities. Stephanie continues to excel at school while working full time and volunteering with Big Brother /Big Sister as a mentor. Stephanie has had to overcome many challenges: a learning disability, poverty, and a drug addicted parent. She has learned to use the obstacles she has overcome to help her gain perspective and a deeper understanding for the families and children that she serves.

CINTHYA CISNEROS, 21, is chemistry major in her senior year at Sonoma State University, the first step in her dream to earn her Ph.D. in Forensic Pathology and work in minority communities with families who have lost a loved one. While achieving academically, Cynthia also commits herself to community service through working at a local garden that feeds families in need, organizes conferences in the Latino community, and gives informational workshops to the AB540 immigrant community. Additionally, she tutors students in chemistry and math and organizes chemistry events at the university for minority K-8 students. Inspired by her brother, who was diagnosed as autistic and went on to attend public school and thrive, Cynthia is determined to be an "AB540 [Tuition Act for immigrant families] Latina who will never quit."

TABITHA FREYTAG, (See 2012 entry, awarded a Second New Leader Scholarship).

JESSIE HERNANDEZ, 21, a senior at U.C., Berkeley, is intent on pursuing graduate work in Public Policy and eventually becoming a legislator who will advocate for the underemployed. He plans on using his public policy training to create career opportunities for low income people of color. Jessie's passion is driven by his own family's experience with unemployment after his father was unable to work due to an injury and his mother suffered language discrimination at the workplace. He's assumed numerous leadership roles throughout his college career, including President of the Latino Undergraduate Mentorship in Public Policy Program at the Goldman School of Public Policy, Multicultural Literature Co-Instructor at Harvey Mudd College Upward Bound Program, and Junior Institute Fellow at the Public Policy and International Affairs Fellowship Program at Princeton University. But the experience that propelled him the most strongly into Public Policy was his internship with Representative Judy Chu and his research and advocacy through the Jobs Now program.

JIRAYUT LATTHIVONGSKORN, 21, is a Molecular and Cell Biology Major at U.C., Berkeley. His long-term goal is to attend medical school. As a Thai immigrant, Jirayut has experienced the alienation and confusion immigrant families face during health crises. He wants to be a doctor who can bridge that distance between patients and their medical care. In addition to his work as an Undergraduate Research Lab Apprentice at the university, Jirayut volunteers at the Suitcase Clinic and at Alta Bates Medical Center. He considers one of his recreational activities his position as Co-Chair of Asian Students Promoting Immigrant Rights Through Education (ASPIRE) where he does outreach and advocacy for DREAM Act- related legislation to help immigrants attend college.

LA'SHAY MORRIS, 24, wants to continue work in Public Planning after she receives her undergraduate degree from San Francisco State University in December 2011. She is majoring in Health Education with a minor in Urban Studies. Inspired by her grandmother, and the first in her family to go to college, La'Shay is acutely aware of the health disparities between West Oakland, where she was raised, and more advantaged communities. Her decision to pursue Public Health rose out of her year studying at the University of Ghana where she worked in a military hospital and taught expectant mothers how to breastfeed their infants properly. In addition to her work tutoring middle and high school students through her church, La'Shay works in Elder Outreach and One Love Center for Health in an effort to eliminate health disparities in her community.

JOSHUA NIELSEN-BALTODANO, (See 2012 entry, awarded a Second New Leader Scholarship).

DELANE SIMS, 50, is a senior at U.C. Berkeley majoring in American Studies with an emphasis on social justice for seniors. She hopes to go on for a Master's in Social Work with an emphasis on public health. From a challenging childhood and young adulthood as a single mother who was sometimes homeless, Delane persevered and stayed committed to making a difference in her community, particularly for seniors. Since 2005 she has nurtured the organization she created, Senior Moments that identifies and provides services to seniors who are homebound and disabled. She also provides service to the community through the Lion's Club and as a Death Penalty Focus Board Member. She spent this summer in Washington, D.C. as a Berkeley student advocating for changes in the legislation regarding incarceration of juveniles and working on health care issues for the elderly. Inspired by her younger sister, Rue Mapp, also a New Leader Scholar, Delane is receiving her first New Leader Scholarship.

MARLYSA THOMAS, 21, a senior at U.C. Berkeley, will graduate in 2012 with an undergraduate degree in African American Studies and a minor in Public Policy and Education. Her efforts to achieve academically began with a personal commitment to be a model for her sisters, but extended to the desire to foster legislative change for her underserved community and honor her ancestors' struggle as an American minority. Challenged by poverty from childhood and financially struggling to stay in college, Marlysa deeply understands the value of education in helping the underserved overcome the external limits of their circumstances. In addition to her coursework, Marlysa tutors Berkeley students and works with the Black Recruitment and Retention Center to help students from middle school through college prepare for and tour California universities, and help U.C., Berkeley retain black students once they're enrolled.