



NEW LEADER SCHOLAR BIOS 2013

HALEH BADKOOBEHI, 32, received her Bachelor's degree in Molecular and Systems Neuroscience from U.C., Berkeley in 2003. She completed her M.D. at Albany Medical College in 2009 and her Masters in Public Health degree from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health this past year. Her thesis was focused on the epidemiology of orthopaedic injuries in post conflict war zones in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Haleh received her medical license and DEA this past year and is now in her third year of orthopaedic residency at Harbor Hospital, a county hospital treating a largely indigent population. She is involved with a number of public health initiatives at Harbor-UCLA, epitomizing her lifelong commitment to underserved, high-risk, poor populations. As a refugee herself, when her own family was unable to return to Iran, she has faced many of the hardships associated with immigration. This had led her to volunteer work at an orphanage in Cambodia and to research and clinical work at HEAL Africa, a non-governmental organization and hospital in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. She is planning similar work in Haiti this coming Spring. Haleh has received five New Leader Scholarships.

ANTHONY CHAN, 22, is a senior at San Francisco State University, majoring in Kinesiology and Asian American Studies. He emigrated to the United States with his family when he was eight years old. Mastering English and becoming acculturated were two major hurdles for him and his poverty-stricken family. Interested in health affairs public policy as a result of his family's experiences, he volunteers at the VA, California Pacific Medical Center, UCSF, and the Physician Organizing Committee. Anthony is also in his second year at AmeriCorps as a team leader in Jumpstart for America. At SFSU, he is a research team leader for the Sunday Streets Economic Assessment Project. Asian American healthcare reform is his passion.

GABRIELLE FALZONE, 42, 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 is the recipient of four new Leader Scholarships.

VERONICA GARCIA, 29, is pursuing a Bachelor's Degree in Latino(a) Studies at San Francisco State University. Despite being a single parent of two, she has been deeply involved in community issues and sees herself as "a leader and a fighter". While at City College of San Francisco, she worked with an on campus group for educational advocacy as a base-building leader. The organization, "Students making a Change", is an on campus project of Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth. She helped transform a racially biased placement testing policy with one that was transformational in nature. The Trustees of City College adopted and have implemented the recommended policy changes this past spring. Veronica hopes to continue her commitment to affect change in her community through undertaking graduate studies in counseling. She hopes that her emphasis on academic and career counseling will benefit future generations of "her community and the larger 'familia'". The Human Rights Commission of San Francisco has selected her as one of eight recipients for the 2013 Human Rights Commission Hero Award.

VICKY GOMEZ, 37, 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 (DfPH) Program. A long time passionate advocate of health equity, she has been working as a researcher on colorectal-cancer 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 received a previous New Leader Scholarship in 2002.

SEDERIC GRANT, 22, is a senior at UC, Berkeley, majoring in Public Health and is committed to becoming a physician. 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. He was active in the Upward Bound Program and currently mentors middle school 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. He plans to address this seriously neglected problem from the inside of medicine as a physician advocate. Currently, Sederic is a Research Assistant at Highland County Hospital in Oakland, gathering and analyzing data in the Emergency Department. This past summer, he studied Physics at the University of Sussex in preparation for his application to medical school.

RUSLAN GURVITS, 21, is a senior, majoring in Economics and Public Policy at UC, Berkeley. His goal is to integrate these two perspectives and bring them to bare on issues in health care. Rus emigrated with his family from the Ukraine in 2000 and his entire family directly experienced extreme difficulty in accessing health care as newcomers to the United States. With these experiences as context, he began volunteering at John Muir Medical Center while in high school and rapidly became the volunteer supervisor. Simultaneously, he became their Quality Management Intern, focusing on quality of care and currently is a research assistant at the Petris Center on Health Care Markets and Consumer Welfare. This past year, Rus became a volunteer for “Save a Child’s Heart”, an organization raising funds for cardiac operations for Israeli and Palestinian children. Rus has been recognized with a dozen awards and scholarships, including the President’s Lifetime Volunteer Service Award.

ANGEL KU, 24, 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 every day 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 entering a doctoral program in Pharmaceutical Sciences and Pharmacogenomics at UCSF this Fall. This is his third New Leader Scholarship.

JENNA LEE, 29, graduated from UC, Berkeley with a degree in Social Welfare and is currently a graduate student in the School of Social Welfare, Management and Planning, also at Berkeley. She was born in Macau, China, lived there and in several other countries until she was 17. She was home-schooled and self-educated until entering community college. At the age of 17, she came to the United States independently and became a volunteer at a center for street and homeless youth in Oregon. It was here that she developed her strong commitment to help those in great need, being inspired by the example of the couple that founded and ran Hearthstone Ministries. She subsequently volunteered for an organization in Mexico and witnessed conditions of poverty that far exceeded those of the homeless with whom she had previously worked. These work and life experiences have informed her desire to establish a career in public service. Following her BA degree, Jenna worked on several fund-raising campaigns for non-profits as well as on a congressional campaign for Dan Seals. She has suffered from a serious head injury as well as other physical problems due to an automobile accident two years ago. This has slowed down Jenna's academic progress but not her spirit and desire to pursue fieldwork internships. She has been a fundraiser for several non-profits and most recently worked with students at Berkeley suffering from severe domestic violence by helping them obtain scholarships and grants. This is Jenna's third New Leader Scholarship.

LONJINO LOZCANO, 22, is a senior at U.C., Berkeley, planning to earn a Bachelor's Degree with majors in both Psychology and Business Administration. Growing up in San Bernardino, one of the poorest cities in the country, greatly shaped his passion to further his education. Surrounded by drugs, violence, and gangs, he struggled to acquire his own moral compass. Finding himself a teenage father at seventeen further strengthened his resolve to behave responsibly toward his son and fiancé. Deciding on an educational path to success, he, his fiancé (who also attends college) and four-year old son came to Berkeley. As a participant in the Sage Scholars Program, he has shown outstanding leadership and acquired a summer research internship in health care at Kaiser Permanente. A year ago, Lonjino contracted Meningococcal Meningitis, which necessitated a double below the knee leg amputations and many months of hospitalization. Suffering from a variety of other physical and emotional problems, he was diagnosed with PTSD. Most remarkably, he has returned to school, is fully engaged in his studies and plans to pursue an MBA Degree with an emphasis on how to use business models to promote philanthropic approaches to low-income communities. He is also running, jumping and walking without assistance.

IRENE LOPEZ, 23, is a senior at the University of California, at Berkeley, majoring in Sociology. As a teenager, living in impoverished circumstances, with little stability and much to fear, she was unable to attend school regularly and suffered the consequences. Once she became a young mother, knowing the impact that instability and insecurity had on her, she set out to create entirely different life circumstances for her daughter. Not only does she excel in school but she has taught a "Teach in Prison" class at UC Berkeley in order to educate other students on the social issues of mass incarceration and its impact on low income minority communities. Her own research focuses on barriers that the formerly incarcerated face. Irene's hope is to apply to law school this fall and become an attorney that can challenge aspects of California's prison system.

CARLOS MACIAS PRIETO, 31, was born in Nochistlan, Zacatecas, Mexico and emigrated 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. 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 a workshop 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 second New Leader Scholarship.

LIZ McCOY, 35, graduated from San Francisco State University with a Bachelor's degree in Psychology in 2011. She is starting a Master's Degree in Social Welfare this semester at UC, Berkeley and plans to attain a Master's degree in Public Health as well. Liz is the single mother of two and has a passionate commitment to becoming an example for her children of how education can play a critical role in shaping an exemplary life. Raised in an emotionally and psychologically challenging environment, she is deeply committed to promoting health and well being among low-income families. She has certificates in Crisis Counseling, Grief Counseling, and Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training, to mention only a few of her additional certificates. Liz is focused on the health and health care disparities that individuals living in disadvantaged communities face and believes that the combination of graduate school training in both Social Welfare and Public Health will allow her to work more effectively toward ending the inherent discrimination that these circumstances create.

This is her second New Leader Scholarship.

TIFFANY MONTGOMERY, 31, graduated from San Jose State University with a B.S. in nursing and a minor in African American Studies. She was named the 2005 Student of the Year by the National Black Nurses Association. She, along with Pastor Franklin T. Hysten, founded a non-profit organization called "Walking the Dream". Additionally, she developed and led a prevention and intervention program for medical emergencies in her community. She has gone on to complete a Master of Science Nursing Program at California State University, Dominguez Hills and is now in the Doctoral Nursing Program at UCLA with a Eugene V. Coa-Robles Fellowship. In addition to numerous awards and prestigious positions related to nursing, she has also established a mentoring academy for high school students desiring to enter nursing. Additionally, she created a scholarship fund at her former high school for students interested in becoming nurses; fundraising began this year and Tiffany has awarded her first scholarship. This is Tiffany's third New Leader Scholarship.

MAITRIA MOUA, 22, graduated from UC, Berkeley in the Spring of 2013 with a Bachelor's degree in Political Science and Asian American Studies. Having been accepted by several law schools, she chose UCLA, believing that her public policy orientation could best be realized there. Growing up in the Central valley of California as a first generation American daughter of Hmong immigrants, Maitria wants to return to the Central Valley as a public defender when her educational goals have been achieved. As a student at Berkeley, she tutored elementary students through the Oakland Asian American Students Educational Services, served as a council member to the Berkeley Student Cooperative and has volunteered for California senator Sydney Fang and U.S. Congresswoman Barbara Lee. Through outreach experiences at UC, Davis Law School and through Harvard's school of Government, her commitment to provide aid to disenfranchised communities has been reinforced. This is her second New Leader Scholarship.

KABRIA PERVOE, 21, is a senior at Berkeley, majoring in Psychology with the intention of going to graduate school in the same field. She is the first in her family to go to college and has been self-supporting since the age of sixteen. Her excellent grades helped award her a placement in the Sage Scholars Program at Berkeley. Coming from an underprivileged and high risk background, it is important to her to be a role model to her nieces and nephews. She is one of five children to a single parent, with two incarcerated brothers. She has volunteered extensively and broadly serving as an ESL tutor, a Literacy Tutor, on the crisis line for domestic violence and Habitat for Humanity. Kabria is currently in Chile for the Fall Study Abroad Program at UC, Berkeley. At the present time, entering a nursing program is foremost on her agenda.

CHRISTYNA SERRANO, 37, received her BA from UC, Berkeley in Sociology and Social Welfare. She is currently working on her Ph.D. in the School of Education, also at Berkeley. While born in the United States, she lived in Puerto Rico until age 11 and then returned permanently to the United States. At age 20, she was awarded a full athletic scholarship to Berkeley but concentrated more on athletics than academics causing her to leave school. Following a seven-year hiatus, she successfully re-entered, now as a single parent. As a woman of color, from an impoverished background, she is dedicated to helping others like herself. As a result, she has served on several university-wide committees, including the Chancellor's Advisory Committee for Dependent Care and has been a student member of a university academic senate committee on "The Status of Women and Ethnic Minorities in Higher Education". Christyna has been awarded the prestigious Chancellor's Fellowship for Graduate Study, a fellowship which is given to a small number of students university-wide. Over the last few years, she has turned her attention to nutrition and poverty as seen through the lens of the school lunch and is writing her dissertation on "The Political Economy of School Lunch". This is her seventh New Leader Scholarship.