



NEW LEADER SCHOLAR BIOS 2014

JEWELL BACHELOR, 23, has moved seamlessly from her senior year at San Francisco State, majoring in Africana Studies to pursuing a Master's Degree in Ethnic Studies. She is the first in her family to attend college and is deeply committed to helping others from similar backgrounds pursue their education. "Growing up as the only daughter of a poor, working class mother of color I was raised to be resilient in a world that expected very little from me" is how she frames her struggle to pursue an advanced education. While working one summer at the Oakland Freedom Schools with 1st and 2nd graders, her passion of remaining involved in her community and having an impact on young African American girls was confirmed. As a result, she founded an after-school program, "Black Diamonds Reflected", with which she hopes to inspire others to reach for the dream which she is in the process of deepening for herself. She has since become a Program Coordinator at Claremont Middle School in Oakland while working on her Master's Degree and studying the use of belittling language by black grade school girls.

HALEH BADKOOBEHI, 33, 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 two year's ago. 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 two year's ago and is now Head Resident of Orthopaedics 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. Haleh has received six New Leader Scholarships.

RICHARD D. BRIDGES, JR., 46, is currently a senior, enrolled at San Francisco State, majoring in health education. Richard's goal is to acquire a Master's Degree in Public Health in order 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.

GABRIELLE FALZONE, 43, 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 five new Leader Scholarships.

VICKY GOMEZ, 38, 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 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. This is her third New Leader Scholarship.

SEDERIC GRANT, 23, 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. He is now enrolled in a graduate program at UC, San Francisco in further preparation for application to dental schools. This is his second New Leader Scholarship.

KRISTOPHE GREEN, 24, is a senior at U.C., Berkeley, pursuing a degree in Psychology and planning to pursue a doctorate in the same field. Until he attended Peralta Community College in 2009, he had not attended school for the previous seven years, making his current educational attainments all the more meaningful. With his father's death when he was in 6th grade, he, his mother and sister, were plunged into dire economic circumstances. As a young African American male with no education or financial support, he was plunged into "panic and despair". Kristophe decided to "fight back" using as his weapon the attainment of an advanced education. Working with underprivileged youth and on issues of educational policy and mental health treatments for youth, are his passions. Currently, he works as a research assistant in the laboratories of three of his professors at Berkeley and also interns with a psychology professor at UCSF, in addition to holding a part-time job.

ROSA HERNANDEZ, 22, is a senior at UC, Berkeley, pursuing a degree in Interdisciplinary Studies. She immigrated to the United States with her mother in 1997, attempting to escape the poverty of her life in rural Michoacán and with the hope of pursuing a higher education. As an undocumented immigrant, Rosa has faced numerous challenges in order to attend college and not fall victim to a life as a field hand or factory worker, like her own mother. Rosa is using her field of study to understand better the intersection of migration, labor and globalization. This has helped her to understand "the factors that shape our world's industrial relations, and thus as existence as laboring subjects", to quote her. These deep concerns, coupled with personal experience, have led her to work with groups such as the Homecare Workers Union, (ULTCW of Oakland), as well as with other labor rights organizations. She has started a support group for undocumented workers who are attempting to organize unions. This group has helped participants discuss issues of immigration and domestic violence. Rosa's future goal is to obtain joint degrees in Law and Public Policy that will allow her to practice Labor and Employment Law.

MARTHA JULISSA HERNANDEZ, 22, is an undergraduate at UC, Berkeley, majoring in Rhetoric and American Studies. She is the first person in her family to attend college against almost insurmountable circumstances. She came to the United States from Honduras at the age of eight to reunite with her family. San Bernardino, where she lived and went to school, is the second poorest city in the country. Martha grew up exposed to violence and crime of all types. As an undocumented immigrant, her success in attaining higher education acts as an inspiration to her high school peers. She has used her life experiences, coupled with her studies at UC, Berkeley, to heighten her consciousness about the persistence of educational inequality. Her internship with the West Contra Costa County Public Education Fund has given her new tools to pursue an advanced degree in educational policy. Her dream is to attend either Harvard or UC, Berkeley and obtain a Master's Degree in Education with the goal of helping to formulate educational policy that will impact low-income communities positively.

MICHELLE NATASHA HONG, 36, is a senior at UC Berkeley pursuing a joint degree in Social Work, Public Health and Public Policy with a minor in education. Growing up in Los Angeles, Michelle lived in a neighborhood affected continuously by violence. As she writes, "For much of my life, death, drugs, and a scarcity of educational opportunities have surrounded me". As a re-entry student and single mother, Michelle works at three part-time jobs while carrying a full class load. She believes that her own ability to forge ahead despite the environment that she grew up in can be translated into affecting change for others from similar backgrounds of poverty. Her 19-year-old brother was shot and paralyzed in a drive by shooting close to her home, increasing her already strong desire to work in affecting public policy regarding access to health care. Currently, she holds positions at the University Health Services and in the Student Re-Entry Offices at UC Berkeley, giving her an opportunity to help others navigate the challenges of returning to school.

ANGEL KU, 25, 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 in his second year of a doctoral program in Pharmaceutical Sciences and Pharmacogenomics at UCSF. This is his fourth New Leader Scholarship.

JIRAYUT LATTHIVONGSKORN, 23, graduated from UC, Berkeley with a major in Molecular and Cell Biology two 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. This 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, with the intent of preparing undocumented students for careers in the health sciences in order to impact health disparities. This is New’s second New Leader Scholarship.

LONJINO LOZCANO, 23, 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. Two years ago, Lonjino contracted Meningococcal Meningitis, which necessitated 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. This is his third New Leader Scholarship.

LIZ McCOY, 36, graduated from San Francisco State University with a Bachelor’s degree in Psychology in 2011. She is starting her second year in the Master’s Degree Program in Social Welfare at UC, Berkeley and plans to also attain a Master’s degree in Public Health. 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 third New Leader Scholarship.

MAITRIA MOUA, 23, 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 third New Leader Scholarship.

CARLOS MACIAS PRIETO, 32, 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 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 third New Leader Scholarship.

JONATHAN VERDUGO, 26, is currently a senior, enrolled at UC Berkeley and pursuing a BA in Political Science. Jonathan became a father at age 19, permanently transforming his life with a promise to himself that he would provide his own son "with the life and father" that he never had. Growing up in San Diego, he experienced what racial profiling in his community could do to the self-esteem of a young man. He found himself embroiled with the juvenile justice system, occasionally homeless, feeling invisible and believing that there were no programs to help him reach for a successful future. One of his brothers was imprisoned, further promoting his desire to search for a different path. He plans to attend law school and ultimately work as a public defender. In particular, the issues of illegal search and seizure procedures and their impact on the youth of a community are a singular focus of his.