



NEW LEADER SCHOLAR BIOS 2015

VIOLETA ALVAREZ, 26, is in her senior year at UC, Berkeley, majoring in Political Science with a minor in Ethnic Studies. She grew up with a single mother who worked two jobs in order to take care of her and her two siblings. As a thirteen-year old, she began a history of drinking, taking drugs and became involved with gangs, spending time in juvenile hall on several occasions. At seventeen, she dropped out of high school and at nineteen found herself in jail facing a long prison sentence. As a result of her incarceration, she vowed to forge a different path for herself and her son through education. She completed her high school diploma and earned an AA degree with honors and was thus able to transfer to UC, Berkeley. Violetta tutors at San Quentin State Prison and is a member of several social justice organizations. She plans to earn a Masters in Public Policy as well as a law degree in order to work with “underprivileged and minority communities” with an emphasis on stigmatized groups.

JEWELL BACHELOR, 24, is in the second year of her Master’s Program in Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University. 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 for remaining involved in her community and having an impact on young African American girls was reaffirmed. As a result, she founded an after-school program, “Black Diamonds Reflected”, with which she hope to inspire others to reach for the dream which she is in the process of deepening for herself. Currently, Jewell works at City Arts and Technology High School where she can fully invest in the young people that she has studied. She is also interning at Bay Area Black United Fund and studying critical issues within Black Bay Area communities. The focus of her thesis is the use of belittling language by Black grade school students. Jewell is in the process of applying to doctoral programs in Ethnic Studies. This is her second new Leader Scholarship.

HALEH BADKOOBEHI, 34, 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 three years 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 three years ago and is now Head Resident of Orthopaedics at Harbor Hospital, a county hospital treating a largely indigent population. This is her last year of residency. 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. This is Haleh’s seventh New Leader Scholarship.

RICHARD D. BRIDGES, JR., 48, is currently a first 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 second New Leader Scholarship.

GABRIELLE FALZONE, 44, 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 six New Leader Scholarships.

VICKY GOMEZ, 39, 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 fourth New Leader Scholarship.

KRISTOPHE GREEN, 25, 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, fell 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 the attainment of an advanced education as his weapon. Working with underprivileged youth and on issues of educational policy and mental health treatments for youth, are his passions. In the summer of 2014 he managed a research project that involved taking inner city youth on river rafting trips to examine how being in nature impacted their mental health; the project was a profound experience for Kristophe as he met many others whose life circumstances mirrored his own. 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. This is Kristophe's second New Leader Scholarship.

MARTHA JULISSA HERNANDEZ, 23, 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 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. This is Martha's second New Leader Scholarship.

JIRAYUT LATTHIVONGSKORN, 26, graduated from UC, Berkeley with a major in Molecular and Cell Biology three 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 third New Leader Scholarship.

LARRY McDANIEL, 31, is currently a senior at UC, Berkeley, majoring in Sociology, transferring from Peralta College after receiving an AA degree. As he saw many of his friends falling victim to the challenges which face poor minority communities and finding himself struggling to survive, he vowed to dedicate himself to helping those coming from similar backgrounds. At Berkeley, he joined a student-run organization “Spread the Word” which assists underperforming minority youth through mentoring and advocacy. He is now the president of this organization. Larry plans to obtain a doctorate in Sociology, become a professor and, in particular, engage in research, which effects policy changes in social structure. Larry holds a Mellon Mays Fellowship in addition to the New Leader Scholarship.

ROBERTO MONICO, 37, is in his final year as an undergraduate student at UC, Berkeley pursuing a degree in either Sociology or American 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 who 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 is a re-entry student and receives a scholarship through the Osher Re-Entry Program as well as being a McNair scholar. 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, which is an honor society in sociology has awarded him membership.

TIFFANY MONTGOMERY, 33, graduated from San Jose State University with a B.S. in nursing and a minor in African American Studies. The National Black Nurses Association named her the 2005 Student of the Year. 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 went on to complete a Master of Science Nursing Program at California State University, Dominguez Hills and is now in her final year of the Doctoral Nursing Program at UCLA. Throughout many years of her graduate education, she has worked a minimum of twenty hours in order to pay down the cost of her education and acquired debt. This year Tiffany holds a Eugene V. Coa-Robles Fellowship allowing her to work fewer hours. 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 last year and Tiffany has begun awarding scholarships. She will defend her dissertation this year with the long-term goal of using her research to decrease the rates of high-risk sexual behavior in minority women. This is Tiffany’s fourth 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. Maitria is now in her final year at UCLA. 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. She has founded a nonprofit Increasing Political Engagement in the Hmong Community to help bring resources to marginalized communities. This is her fourth New Leader Scholarship.

CARLOS MACIAS PRIETO, 33, was born in Nochistlan, Zacatecas, and 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 fourth New Leader Scholarship.

TAMRIN STEWART, 20, is an advanced junior at UC, Berkeley majoring in Political Science and African American Studies. From the time that she enrolled at Berkeley as a freshman, she has been engaged in various community service projects and leadership activities. She was selected as a recipient of the Posse Scholars Program from hundreds of applicants and currently is in the VeVe Clark Institute of Scholars program. This is a program geared to helping the most promising African American Studies majors become prepared for graduate school. She mentors and tutors students at Berkeley High School twice weekly and has taken on a positions at program coordinator at Stiles Hall to help recruit and assist underrepresented college seniors in applying to UC Berkeley. Tamrin dreams of entering a joint J.D./MPP Program at UC Berkeley or Stanford Law School in order to work for the Department of Justice.

JONATHAN VERDUGO, 27, 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. This is his second New Leader Scholarship.