

Meet our 2023-2024 Scholarship Recipients

Devin Wallets

What is your hometown? Denton, Texas

Major: Psychology

Year in School: Junior

Why did you choose your field of study?

I took an AP Psychology course in my sophomore year of high school, but it was only a semester long. I felt I wanted to know so much more and there are so many fields of study within psych. I think the human brain is complex and fascinating, so studying it makes me happy.

What are your career goals?

I haven't quite narrowed down my scope yet, but I like forensic psychology a lot and child development. Maybe something to do with inmates in the future, or helping children.



What or who has influenced you the most so far in your life, and how do you plan to benefit from this influence going forward? It could be a relative, friend, a public figure, an event, an organization, a sport-whatever you feel has been most important to you.

My mother has influenced me tremendously! She was a single mother of three as I grew up and I watched her struggle and come to terms with loneliness often. Now I have paid my way through school by earning scholarships and keeping my grades up so I can ensure I can not only take care of myself, but her as well. She is my biggest supporter and I plan to keep that relationship strong.

What does receiving a scholarship mean to you?

It means security! In high school, I decided I would have to be valedictorian to get into college; there would be no other way to ensure I would have money to go unless I got a full ride. And I did. Four long years of work and effort paid off so I could create the future I dreamed of. And now as I am awarded more scholarships that I apply for, it makes my work at the University feel so validated and appreciated. I truly would not be here if it weren't for the generosity of scholarship donors, who take an interest in kids like me and want to help us fund whatever we deem necessary.

Outside of class, what are your interests – hobbies, volunteer work, etc.?

I like to play piano, sing, read books like Game of Thrones, hang out with my friends and explore new Austin places! I also work as a behavior interventionist for children with autism which keeps me on my toes.

If you had two extra hours in a day, what would you do?

Honestly... probably a nap. I enjoy naps quite a bit but most days there is just not time.

Bill Geng

What is your hometown? San Antonio, Texas

Major: Biology

Year in school: Sophomore

Why did you choose your field of study?

I was always interested in the life sciences.

What are your career goals?

To become a doctor

What or who has influenced you the most so far in your life, and how do you plan to benefit from this influence going forward?

My Dad has always motivated me to do better.

What does receiving a scholarship mean to you?

It means a lot to me since balancing spending and tuition is difficult.

Outside of class, what are your interests – hobbies, volunteer work, etc.?

I love playing basketball.

If you had two extra hours in a day, what would you do?

I would love to run.



Nicole Casaca-Watkins

What is your hometown? Crosby, Texas

Major: Psychology

Year in School: Junior

Why did you choose your field of study?

I chose to study Psychology because it fascinated me growing up. I'd like to understand how people work, and then work with them to make a change.

What are your career goals?

My current goals for the future are to get into a forensic psychology graduate program sometime after I graduate, get licensed after that, and then work with incarcerated populations to promote reform.



What or who has influenced you the most so far in your life, and how do you plan to benefit from this influence going forward? I always felt that my passion for art and it has led me where I need to go in all my endeavors. In a way, it is my biggest support system. It has taught me a lot about my perceptions of life, and how to approach things from creative angles when I get stuck. It keeps me grounded when things get chaotic, and it never ceases to inspire me and motivate me to continue achieving in all other aspects of my life.

What does receiving a scholarship mean to you? Receiving a scholarship means a lot to me, to say the least. Many unfathomable circumstances in life had the opportunity to stop me in my tracks, but support like this allows me to keep seeking my education in the face of adversity. I am very thankful.

Outside of class, what are your interests?

I am working, or participating in my two labs. When I'm not doing those things, I am creating art to relax, writing poetry, watching a series I like or spending time with my friends.

If you had two extra hours in a day, what would you do? If I had two extra hours in a day, I would probably use them to get more rest or make more time for the activities I enjoy doing when I'm not doing school or work! That way, I would be more well-prepared to face my daily responsibilities.

Angela New

What is your hometown? Austin, Texas

Major: Radio-Television-Film and Entrepreneurship

Year in School: Sophomore



Why did you choose your field of study? I chose Radio-Television-Film because I grew up adoring TV shows and movies and want to be able to share my messages through that medium. I think entertainment can be very influential to audiences, and I wanted to study RTF in order to learn the best ways to immerse people in stories they can learn from. It's also very fulfilling to me to be doing creative work, and filmmaking has a lot of problem-solving aspects that require thinking efficiently and outside of the box, which are skills I enjoy exercising and would like to build on in my college career.

What are your career goals? I would like to have a very multifaceted career in film and television. I'd like to delve into different genres, different mediums (like mini-series, feature films, and music videos), as well as different roles like writing/directing/editing. I'd eventually want to find what I enjoy the most and stick to that, but after graduating my goal is to try as many hats as possible so that my resume and portfolio reflect my diverse interests and skills.

What or who has influenced you the most so far in your life, and how do you plan to benefit from this influence going forward? My parents have influenced me the most, especially in regards to my education and career. They both pushed me to do my best in school and continue into higher education, since they didn't fully pursue degrees after their high school years. This encouragement has benefited me because I've kept up this momentum of learning after high school, and all the great experiences and people I've encountered in my time at UT. They also never discouraged my goals of working in the entertainment industry, and find it as exciting and interesting as I do. Their enthusiasm will give me strength to persevere in the unpredictable world of film and TV.

What does receiving a scholarship mean to you? UT Austin is a very large school and to be one of the limited recipients of this award makes me feel like I stand out in this space. It makes all the effort I put into my education and work feel worth it, and encourages me to keep working, as hard work gets rewarded. Receiving this scholarship also lifts some weight off my shoulders as I can take some time from working to focus on my education and filmmaking.

Outside of class, what are your interests? My interests in film, and TV shows through my volunteer work at the Austin Film Festival, who I've worked alongside since high school, I also have a passion for music, and I host a radio show for KVRX Student Radio, as well as edit live music performances for KVRX. I'm kind of a foodie. I love going around Austin and embracing different cultures and cuisines that are found around the city, and occasionally posting these meals with my reviews on a food blog.

If you had two extra hours in a day, what would you do? I think I would write more. A lot of successful people I know say it's important to write every day. I have experienced the emotional and creative benefits of writing for myself, but I rarely have the time to sit down and write. I would make a daily routine to write for 1-2 hours, whether it be writing a script, poetry, a diary, or just some journal entry.

Breyona Mitchell

What is your Hometown: Houston, Texas

Major: English and Studio Art (Double Major)

Year in school: Junior

Why did you choose your field of study? I chose English and Art because I eventually want to write my own fiction novels and comics! Books and art are my biggest passions and I want a career that combines them.

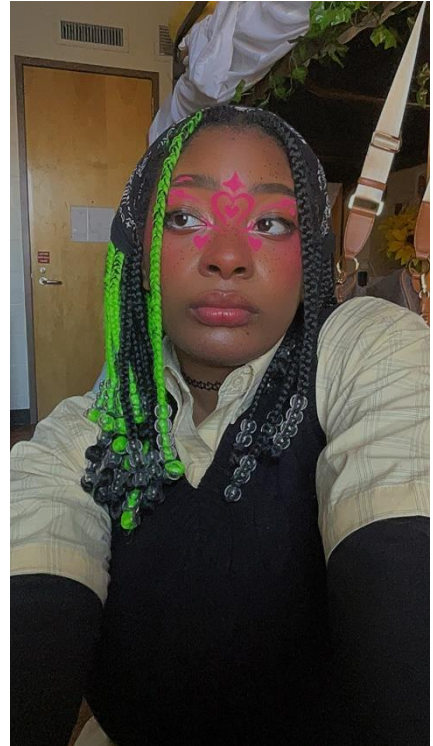
What are your career goals? I want to become a storyboard artist or character designer in the art industry and independently publish novels/comics.

Who or what has influenced you the most so far in your life, and how do you plan to benefit from this influence going forward? As cliché as it is to say, my family has influenced me the most. A lot of my art and writing draws from experiences I've had in my life, and my family is a large portion of that. I've created characters and art pieces based around my family and my feelings towards them. And as much as they've influenced my creative spirit so far, I know they'll continue to be my muse and inspiration for years, if not the rest of my life.

What does receiving this scholarship mean to you? Receiving the scholarship means more time spent pursuing my goals instead of stressing about the financial side of college. I'm better able to focus on studying for classes and creating art (both in class and outside of it) It's also given me more opportunities to be social and hang out with my friends without the stress of, I should be doing something else right now.

Outside of class what are your interests? I enjoy watching horror movies, playing video games (sometimes with my brother), fashion (I am currently a member of Obsidian Magazine, UT's first all Black magazine!), drawing for the Daily Texan (I'm currently the Associate Comics editor) and hanging out with friends.

If I had two extra hours in a day what would you do? That's a hard question because I barely get enough sleep as is, so sleeping is very tempting, but honestly, I'd probably draw more!



Louis Cao

What is your Hometown: Richmond, Texas

Major: Business Analytics/McCombs Success Scholar and Computational Science and Engineering Program and Elements of Computing

Year in school: Junior



Why did you choose your field of study? I've always identified and been motivated by the idea of growth. Naturally, I found myself studying business, a place where I could get the best of both worlds in terms of soft and technical skills. I've also always found myself fascinated by quantitative and analytical rigor, hence my additional work in computer science. With these disciplines, I hope to understand the uncertainty of our world. I think it is powerful to be able to predict the financial markets or tell a patient with certainty that their tumor won't grow fatally. With my coursework, I'm on the path to do just that.

What are your career goals? Sell my soul to Wall Street, conduct research in the Uncertainty Quantification and Inversion field, or become a professor. Maybe it is none of the above; maybe it's all the above in varying orders. Only time will tell.

Who or what has influenced you the most so far in your life, and how do you plan to benefit from this influence going forward? Lately it has been my statistics professor, Dr. Lukoff. He has the ability to explain fundamental and complex concepts, problems and solutions effortlessly, all without condescension. He and I also have "Brain Teasers/Probability Fridays" where we pitch each other fun problems to solve. It is an absolute blast. It's these little moments that made me finally appreciate math, statistics, and probability. It is only because of him that I've been able to figure out what I want to do with the rest of my life. Without him, who knows? Maybe I would still be studying accounting.

What does receiving this scholarship mean to you? Simply said, the RFSA scholarship is a validation of my efforts and enables me to get back to really what matters.

Outside of class what are your interests? Eating, gym, reading, chess, brain teasers.

If I had two extra hours in a day what would you do? Eat.

Bilal Choudhry

Hometown: Murphy, Texas

Major: Business

Year in school: Sophomore

Janny Li

Hometown: Katy, Texas

Major: Psychology & Social and Behavioral Sciences

Year in school: Senior

Lucas Lin

Hometown: Keller, Texas

Major: Biology, Healthcare Reform and Innovation

Year in school: Sophomore

Santino Hassett

Hometown: Oak Lawn, Texas

Major: Chemical Engineering

Year in school: Sophomore

Zhihao Fan

Hometown: China

Major: Exercise Science and Allied Health Professions

Year in school: Junior

Zayana Uddin

Hometown: Wichita Falls, Texas

Major: Psychology and Art History

Year in school: Senior

Olivia Willemsen

Hometown: Round Rock, Texas

Major: Psychology and Business

Year in school: Sophomore