

MEET OUR 2024-2025 Scholarship Recipients

Folakemi Elekolusi

What is your hometown? Houston, Ile-Ife, Nigeria, Central London, UK

School: College of Liberal Arts

Major: Government

Year in School: Sophomore

Why did you choose your field of study?

Early on, I found out what my interest were. At 13 I had just moved to the United States for just 3 years when the build of racism I had experienced which sought to silence my voice did the opposite and helped me find it instead.

What are your career goals?

I hope to attend law school and become a practicing lawyer. I also hope to advocate for issues that matter to me and have affected me as a student and others around me – issues such as housing exploitation, education inequality, and racial and gender inequality.

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.

The values instilled in me by my two parents have made me who I am. Although they might have wanted me to be a doctor, they didn't know that the values of hard work, confidence and along with their sacrifice to immigrate to America would mold me into someone who wants to advocate for others. I am using the voice my parents encouraged me vigorously to find.

What does receiving a scholarship mean to you?

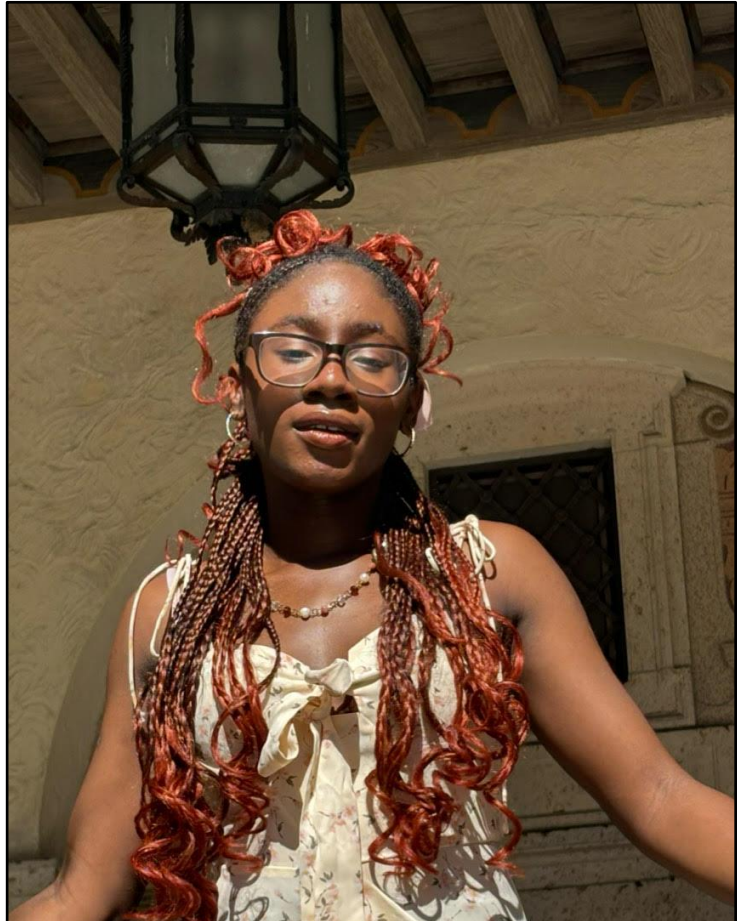
This scholarship is another hope of my being able to complete my higher education at The University of Texas at Austin. Without this scholarship, I would have had a lot of difficulty paying my initial bills.

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

Outside of class I intern with the office of Congressman Lloyd Doggett, work with Annie's List, serve as the Professional Opportunities Advocacy Director of Student Government, and teach at UT Austin as a first year Interest Group mentor.

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

I would settle down and finally read the last book in the trilogy of Children of Blood and Bones by Tomi Adeyemi. I bought it and I am so excited to crack it open but haven't found the time while settling into the busy life of school.



Sorilah Montemayor

What is your hometown? Baytown, Texas

School: McCombs School of Business

Major: Accounting

Year in school: Sophomore

Why did you choose your field of study?

I chose to go to the McCombs School of Business because that was what my brother wanted to pursue a degree in and I look up to him so much. Furthermore, I am going down the accounting route because I love math, working with numbers, and the satisfaction of having a balanced balance sheet. The financial/accounting industry is something that has always fascinated me.

What are your career goals?

I hope to join the IMPA program and minor in either Management or National Security and International Business. I think these degrees will help me with the skills I need to pursue my career goals after college. My career goal is to work for a firm that fosters positivity and promotes a safe working environment, with the ultimate goal of becoming CFO. In turn, I will start a non-profit organization for baseball and softball players, named after my brother. As a former softball player, I understand the financial challenges that come with it and would love to give back to my community.

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 brother has had the biggest influence on me as he was such a hardworking, dedicated and loving soul. I plan to benefit from his influence by giving my all every day, always being someone anybody can talk to, and doing good for others in need.

What does receiving a scholarship mean to you?

Receiving the scholarship means everything to me. It allows me to focus on my academics without the stress of finances. Being a first generation, you don't know what to expect financially coming into college and it was very overwhelming. I'm so glad that I have been blessed with scholarships to help relieve my family and me.

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

I love to play any kind of sport, but mainly softball, volleyball and pickleball. I am a huge Dallas Cowboys fan, so I spend my Sundays on the couch watching football. Additionally, I love baking, shopping and arts and crafts.

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

I would 100% use it towards sleep. As a college student, I definitely don't dedicate enough time to get good, adequate sleep. I think I would definitely have a more productive day as a result.



Erik Lara Barrientos

Hometown: Lockhart, Tx

School: Nursing

Major: Nursing

Year in School: Sophomore



Why your field of study?

I was originally set on pursuing a medical degree and working as a physician, but as I began to look deeper into it, I realized that I would have much more success advocating for patients as a nurse. As a nurse, I am able to reap the benefits of having the ability to fight for what's best for my patients while also working in a medical environment. Patients rights and the ability to make educated

decisions about their body are incredibly important to me given I've been one of the biggest advocates for my maternal grandma in her battle with cancer. She only speaks Spanish, and I've taken it upon myself to accompany her to all her appointment., I fell in love with creating a voice for her in a setting that can be so daunting.

What are your career goals? I am also incredibly passionate about law and the business aspect of the healthcare industry. However, I am more focused on fighting for the rights of my patients and the public. I will continue to fight for affordable and practical healthcare and increased accessibility to medication and healthcare information. I intend on practicing as a registered nurse for a couple of years and then applying to law school and becoming a practicing healthcare attorney. Although I'm not entirely certain of my professional pathway, my passion for equality in healthcare will remain strong and unwavering.

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 mother has undoubtedly been the one who has influenced me most. As someone who ironically grew up fearful of doctors' offices and the dentist, my mother was always there in my younger years calming me down or holding my hand whenever I needed it. She took care of me when I was at my lowest or when I felt sick and yet she never made me feel embarrassed or uncomfortable. Now I understand it is because of how comfortable my mother made me feel in my own skin that I want to o the same in return for my patients.

What does receiving a scholarship mean to you? Receiving any sort of financial aid means being able to focus in class. I am not sitting in class thinking about how I will be paying for my education, but rather I am in class focusing my attention on the lecture or assignment. Being blessed with such generosity enables me to keep pursuing my passions on becoming a nurse and hopefully one day, I will be able to give back to the world without having to think twice!

Outside of class, what are your interests? I love to go on hikes, play tennis, create extensive playlists for different occasions, bake, cook and watch horror movies. If I'm invited to go watch a move and it's not a horror movie, it may take a bit of convincing to get me to go!

If you had two extra hours in a day, what would you do? Realistically, I would take those two hours to get extra sleep. I've never seen extra sleep or naps as something negative; If anything, being well rested helps promote productivity.

Arnav Jain

What is your hometown? Katy, Texas

School: Cockrell School of Engineering

Major: Electrical and Computer Engineering (ECE)

Year in School: Sophomore

Why did you choose your field of study? I chose Electrical and Computer Engineering because I was fascinated with how technology solves complex problems and improves lives. My early curiosity about electronics drove me to explore programming and hardware projects deepening my passion for the field.

What are your career goals? My long-term career goal is to become a leader in the field of Electrical and Computer Engineering, contributing to technological advancements that have a meaningful impact on society. I am to work on innovative projects focused on sustainable energy and smart technologies, addressing critical real-world challenges.

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? One of the most influential people in my life has been my father. His work ethic, resilience and commitment to continuous learning have shaped my approach to both academics and personal development. Watching him navigate challenges with a positive attitude taught me the value of perseverance and adaptability. Moving forward I plan to apply these lessons by embracing new challenges, staying committed to my goal and constantly seeking opportunities to grow both professionally and personally. His influence inspires me to become a dedicated leader and problem solver in my field.

What does receiving a scholarship mean to you? Receiving this scholarship is deeply meaningful to me because it eases the financial demands of my education, allowing me to focus more on my classes and extracurriculars. This support also enables me to take on leadership roles and mentor fellow students, helping to build a stronger more collaborative community at UT Austin.

Outside of class, what are your interests? I enjoy staying active through a combination of weightlifting, running and playing soccer, which helps me balance my academic and personal life. I also love watching movies and exploring different genres, as well as listening to music to unwind and stay inspired. Spending time with friends and family is important to me as well, as they provide support and enrich my life with shared experiences and perspectives. These interests keep me well-rounded and help me to maintain a healthy work-life balance.

If you had two extra hours in a day, what would you do? If I had two extra hours in a day, I'd dive deeper into supporting younger students with their college journey. Building on my previous tutoring and mentorship experiences, I'd create more detailed resources and workshops covering topics like effective study habits, time management and career planning. This way I could extend my impact and help more students navigate their college years with confidence.



Anna Vu

What is your Hometown: Chi Minh, Vietnam

School: College Geology

Major: General Geology

Year in school: Sophomore

Why did you choose your field of study? Although this century's volcano monitoring systems and research programs have advanced significantly, there are still areas for improvement that I wish to promote. A pressing issue exists: developing countries lack the resources and technology to face natural disasters properly. I chose to study geology to understand the earth's changes and aid communities against geohazards.

What are your career goals? I want to get my Master's degree before pursuing a PhD in either geology or geophysics. Although I'm still figuring things out, I'm especially interested in researching geohazards and volcanology.

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? My parents have influenced me the most. I am a first-generation student, so achieving my dreams allows them to live theirs vicariously through me. While I am not my father's first child, I am my mother's. I will be the first of her children to be able to provide a future for myself in America. They inspire me to try my best and succeed in a country far away from our family in Vietnam.

What does receiving this scholarship mean to you? A scholarship allows me to show my parents (and myself) that I can do what is seen as difficult and that I have opportunities available for my future. Soon my siblings will be looking to attend college. To ask my parents to fund our education is out of the question. Attending a four-year university is costly for an individual, much less for multiples. Being a "role model" means to lead a path that my younger siblings would want to take. Affording college is part of this because I want to show them that working to our utmost capacity is necessary to build a future for ourselves like my father had done.

Outside of class what are your interests? I like to play pickleball, hang out with my friends, play games like Valorant, write/read poetry and travel. I also like to do research in a lab for a professor (not sure if that counts as class).

If I had two extra hours in a day what would you do? I would probably just spend time with myself. Although I socialize often, I am very much an introvert, and I feel most energized in my alone and free time.



Chelsi Lam

Hometown: Dallas, TX

School: College of Natural Science

Major: Neuroscience

Year in school: Sophomore

Why your field of study?

I chose Neuroscience because I was interested in becoming a healthcare professional in neurology.

What are your career goals?

I want to become a neurologist or a neurology PA.

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?

My Mom has been the most significant influence in my life. I plan to carry the life lessons she's taught me throughout my life!

What does receiving this scholarship mean to you?

The scholarship provides financial stability for me as a first-generation college student.

Outside of class what are your interests?

I volunteer at a hospital. I love to draw and read. I also love to explore new food spots in Austin with my friends.

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

I would try out different hobbies.



Mattea Gallaway

What is your Hometown: North Richland Hills, Tx

School: Moody College of Communication

Major: Radio-Television-Film

Year: Sophomore

Why did you choose your field of study? I watched a lot of movies when I was younger, as they were a way to bond with my parents, and I got to a point where I wanted to learn everything about them and how they're made. After taking audio/video production courses for three years in high school, I realized that I loved immersing myself in filmmaking and therefore chose Radio-Television-Film!

What are your career goals? Over the summer, I came to terms with the fact that I have always been fated to go to grad school, which is something I've gone back and forth between wanting to do for years, but now it makes sense because I want to become a film studies professor! I would love to get involved in academia and find a niche topic in film history to dissect and teach because I feel like film studies have become a lost art among people in my generation. So many people my age say they want to be in the industry in all sorts of ways but they don't go back and explore cinema history, which blows my mind because there's so much to learn from older films and they can be so enriching. I must add that I want to write screenplays as well, and I'd love to find film publications to write for; maybe going freelance. I just want to keep writing!

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 first and foremost. I watched a lot of movies with them growing up and they were always like "That'll be you in the credits someday," or "I can't wait to see you write something this good" ... you know, stuff like that. They've always supported my ambitions from the get-go, and they've also taught me how to be respectful, kind, and a functional person in general! I genuinely don't know where I would be without them, and every time I feel myself falling, I think of their enthusiasm for me! I also want to shout out all of the organizations I've been in, jobs I've had, publications I've written for, and film sets I've been on because each of those experiences are forever a part of who I am!

What does receiving a scholarship mean to you? It means so much! I've had lots of financial anxiety over the years, but this scholarship provides so much stability and has encouraged me to continue my education! I was initially worried about going to UT because of costs, but I now feel that much of that anxiety has been alleviated. This is an honor, thank you!

Outside of class, what are your interests – hobbies, volunteer work, etc.? I feel quite boring at the moment because I would like to say reading or playing piano, but I haven't consistently done either in a while. I would definitely have to go with photography because it's something I've engaged in this year more than ever thanks to an internship I had, and I want to learn everything about it! I also have a 73-day French streak on Duolingo... does that count?

If you had two extra hours in a day, what would you do? Watch another movie. I fear I will never get through my entire watchlist.



Additional Scholarship Recipients:

- **Iliana Almendarez**
- **Brandon Bui**
- **Rwainee Chaka**
- **Dayanara Chavez**
- **Payton Cooper**
- **Courteney Heyward**
- **Bryli Jameson**
- **Snit Kidane**
- **Austin Le**
- **Ayeman Maknojia**
- **Caleb Phillips**
- **Ashryn Pinkston**
- **Marcos Ramirez**
- **Rylei Ripley**
- **Jonathan Simon**
- **Kiana Swiatkowski**