

Who are the Opportunity Scholars Bloggers?

[Angelica Robinson](#)

Hometown: New Orleans, LA

College/University attending: Dillard University, '13



Having to rebuild her home at age 15 due to Hurricane Katrina showed Angelica that she had the strength to overcome any obstacle and at the same time nurtured her passion for writing as an outlet for the horrors she witnessed. She has chosen to stay in New Orleans to attend Dillard University where she plans to parlay her love of writing into a Mass Communications/Journalism major.

"My mother always told me that education is the only way out, so this [opportunity] will be a significant stepping stone towards my education at Dillard University, where I'll be able to contribute to the university by sharing with those around me my life experiences and lessons learned through writing. I will share my experiences with others through my writing, and allow them to enter a world that is uniquely my own. Hopefully my writing will inspire and give others strength to continue fighting their wars and to find the courage to open up their world."

[Abigail Macias](#)

Hometown: Sparks, NV

College/University attending: Dartmouth College, '14



Not having a dollar to her name, the daughter of Mexican immigrants, and the product of the "ghetto", Abigail has used her experiences to challenge herself and to succeed. She knows that she can teach her classmates at Dartmouth something just as they will teach her.

"I don't allow myself to be swept away by another person's beat; I grab some drums and start a parade. For me, college won't be a time to live recklessly or selfishly, but rather a time for me to further my goals, make an impact on whomever I meet, and become a better leader."

[Alexis Montes](#)

Hometown: National City, CA

College/University attending: University of Rochester, '15



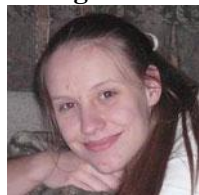
Academics were hardly a priority Alexis's family. His family had bigger things to worry about, like if they were going to be able to pay the rent. Alex grew up very quickly, having to deal with the harsh realities of poverty and violence in his neighborhood and within his family. He eventually made it his goal to be the first in his family to go to college in order to pursue success and his own personal enlightenment.

"My faith and my education now carry me to uncharted paths, away from a past filled with grief and guilt. I'm prepared to say goodbye to old friends and family and finally focus on myself and my education wholeheartedly. Thank you to those who loved me when I didn't love myself, those who believed that I could make it."

[Ashley Roberts](#)

Hometown: St. Peter, MO

College/University attending: Illinois Wesleyan University, '13



Following time in foster care and the tragic death of her guardian uncle from cancer, Ashley is putting herself through Illinois Wesleyan University, refusing to become a statistic like her alcoholic, drug addict mother and relishing the opportunity to further prove what she is capable of achieving.

"I have more of a want and need to go to college than anyone I know. I am putting myself through college and some are still telling me that I shouldn't bother. I refuse to let that happen. I am not nor will I ever be a statistic. I have reached a point in my life where I have finally been given the chance to show that I am my own person. This is my opportunity to be who I am and show what I am capable of succeeding."

[Cynthia Cruz](#)

Hometown: Chicago, IL

College/University attending: Illinois Wesleyan University, '15



Cynthia was born and raised in Chicago, IL. She is the daughter of a deceased father and a mother suffering from Lupus. Despite these unthinkable tragedies, she continues to pick herself up from every obstacle as she strives to be the first in her family to attend college. She plans to double major in Mathematics Special Education with a minor in Hispanic Studies.

"I am a special education major because of personal reasons; some of the most amazing people in my life are individuals with special needs and I feel I'm "called" to help educate them and others who might have some difficulties with learning."

[DaLonn Pearson](#)

Hometown: New Haven, CT

College/University attending: Southern Connecticut State University, '13



DaLonn, an *A Better Chance* scholar, who moved away from home at the age of 15 to further educate himself and be the first in his family to graduate from high school, serves as an African-American role model for his younger siblings and other young children in his community by showing how his hard work has paid off as he starts his freshman year at St. John's University.

"I have worked extremely hard to get to where I am now. I balance school, sports, and multiple jobs and I give back to my community by working with younger students. I have been the first in my family to graduate high school and move on to college. It's more than just me, however. I am also representing my family. This makes me even more determined to achieve my goals, and I feel this [opportunity] will contribute to my success."

[Duylam Nguyen-Ngo](#)

Hometown: Richmond, VA

College/University attending: University of Virginia, '13



Despite growing up in a dangerous neighborhood, Duylam, a budding entrepreneur of Asian-American descent, is eager to pursue a business degree at Babson. He credits his single mother with inspiring him to be the first in his family to go to college.

"No one in my family ever went to college but I knew I wanted to set a precedent for my entire family."

[Irvin Gomez](#)

Hometown: Waukegan, IL

College/University attending: Dartmouth College, '14



Irvin is the proud son of Mexican immigrants who left it all behind in order for him to achieve a better education and by consequence, a better future. Irvin graduated with the honor of being the first male Latino salutatorian from his high school and is thrilled to be attending Dartmouth College.

"I am the first in my family to attend college in the United States so I am lighting the path for my younger brother as well as for the large Latino community in which I live. I consider myself privileged to have been given the support and the resources to attend college and thus, I feel the responsibility to show others the way. In addition, I believe that the greatest way to honor the sacrifice of my parents is by earning a degree from Dartmouth and proudly handing it to them."

Jenny Luong

Hometown: Oakland, CA

College/University attending: Amherst College, '14



Growing up in Oakland amidst violence and drugs, Jenny wants to ensure that no other kids are forced to feel the fear she felt during a short, one-block walk to her friend's house. She is attending Amherst with the goal of becoming a doctor and helping her community become a less violent place. *"I will not be another high school dropout. I will not be another drug addict. I want my future, and I will not let low expectations bring me down. I will further my education and seek the many possibilities the future has in store."*

Jeremy Harris

Hometown: Chicago, IL

College/University attending: University of Missouri, '14



Jeremy was born and raised in Chicago, Illinois on the West Side where senseless youth violence is prevalent and graduation from high school is not the goal for many youth today. He is proud to be breaking that trend and is attending University of Missouri to become an Actuarial. *"As I head to Columbia, Missouri (Mizzou) to attend the University of Missouri, I realize how blessed I am. I'm still alive. I'm not a statistic. I have a great mom, an awesome stepdad who has been in my life for twelve years and an older brother who's set an example for me by staying out of trouble."*

Jesse Sanchez

Hometown: San Diego, CA

College/University attending: Harvard University, '13



Jesse, who aspires to be the first Latino mayor of San Diego, overcame the obstacles of poverty and gangs to go to Harvard as not only the first person in his family to attend college but also as a source of pride for his culture and community. *"Even though I dreamed of going to college, the negative social stigmas that resonate through my neighborhood almost led me to give up on that dream. I hope to be the role model that many of the students in my community lack. I want to prove that academic success is possible, no matter what obstacles one may face."*

Joe Dingman

Hometown: Pueblo, CO

College/University attending: Occidental College, '13



Aspiring politician Joe Dingman hails from Pueblo, CO and after serving as a delegate to The American Legion's Boy's Nation and working on numerous campaigns for prominent Federal, State, and Local lawmakers, he is excited to start Occidental College as the first in his family to go to college. *"I am tremendously fortunate to have beacons of support who made my college goals attainable. I know people live their entire lives for the realization of a college education."*

[Joey Lynn](#)

Hometown: Pelham, GA

College/University attending: University of Georgia, '15



Joseph was born in Florida but soon after moved to a small town in southern Georgia. Due to some setbacks that occurred, he left high school for a year. After working in the construction business for a year, he decided to go back to high school. He worked extremely hard and graduate from high school with honors. He is currently double majoring in Social Studies Education and History at The University of Georgia.

"The town in which I attended school was relatively poor, but luckily, it furnished its students with some of the best teachers in the nation. I was encouraged to take challenging courses, made even harder by the fact that I was behind in credit an entire year. With the help of my teachers, though, I made it through those classes. A few anxiety-filled months later, I was accepted to the University of Georgia, and soon after that, I graduated as an honor graduate from my high school."

[Jordan Lillegard](#)

Hometown: Long Beach, CA

College/University attending: University of Southern California, '14



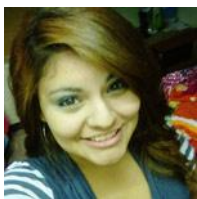
At the age of three, Jordan's mother left his biological, drug dealing father. Despite not having a stable home to call his own and time spent living in a battered women's shelter, Jordan focused on his studies and made his lifelong dream of going to USC come true.

"I do not need to follow in my father's footsteps, for I am different. He has spent over half of his life in prison but I use that as motivation to be as successful as I possibly can be. I have dedicated myself fully to my schoolwork, for I know that my studies are what will make me successful in the future."

[Julianna Moreno](#)

Hometown: Houston, TX

College/University attending: Texas State University at San Marcos, '15



Julianna grew up with a caring family, her parents were able to manage their income and she always had what she needed. However, her junior year at high school, her life took a completely different direction. Julianna's parents started having problems and in less than a year, she went through domestic violence, parents separated, and she and her siblings were left without a home. However, she didn't let this discourage her. On the contrary, it made Julianna strive towards the education she needed in order to be successful in the future.

"Everyone has their own story and certain situations they overcome, but I am glad this was mine, because it changed me for the better. I transformed into a stronger person and I became more responsible and mature. I've learned that life is full of obstacles, life is not fair, and that life can be devastating and fearful at times. However, I believe I am prepared to face the next chapter of my life and I am very grateful for this opportunity to blog about my experiences throughout my college years."

[Khadijah Williams](#)

Hometown: Los Angeles, CA

College/University attending: Harvard University, '13



Never having had a stable place to live, Khadijah has made education her anchor and is thrilled to have achieved her dream of leaving Skid Row and attending Harvard. As a homeless student, she has a unique perspective on education and hopes to contribute to the improvement of urban schools.

"Because my mentors have shown kindness for me, I am committed to giving back in the same way. As an individual who has been through many setbacks and has succeeded despite obstacles, I understand what it takes to succeed. I am committed to passing on the knowledge and the tools for

success to tomorrow's youth."

Lauren Mayo

Hometown: Marietta, GA

College/University attending: University of Georgia, '15



Though peers and teachers always underestimated her abilities, Lauren has always persevered. She deflated every statistic and judgment and is now attending the University of Georgia.

"Being a Black girl and not coming from the idealistic two parent household never served as an excuse for mediocrity. I even was accepted to the university of my dreams."

Leah Jean-Louis

Hometown: Cambridge, MA

College/University attending: Swarthmore College, '14



As the sixth child out of nine in her Haitian family, Leah took on the role as caretaker while her older siblings worked to contribute to her family's income. Despite many day-to-day hardships such as not having hot water, college was always a dream for Leah and she is thrilled to be attending Swarthmore College where she is considering majoring in engineering.

"My parents didn't go to college. They received their high school diploma in their motherland. My older siblings didn't know about the process either. They all applied to only one school. They didn't have any choices. Things were simple for them. But that's not how I want my future to be. I want to have choices. I want to be in control of my future."

Long Dang

Hometown: Dorchester, MA

College/University attending: Williams College, '15



Born in the Philippines, Long moved to Vietnam when he was four and then to the United States at the age of seven. He is looking forward to embracing a liberal arts education and to being exposed to new subjects, such as Art History and Arabic.

"One day, I hope to return to urban communities to help provide opportunities for students to succeed. I want to be able to provide resources and support for students who don't have all the necessities to compete with their affluent counterparts. I want to help students in urban communities so that they can have a better chance at achieving a higher education."

Lot Kwarteng

Hometown: Bronx, NY

College/University attending: Miami University, '14



As a son of immigrants from Ghana, Lot involves himself in developing multicultural awareness. He has witnessed poverty, broken homes and a lackluster education system, but seeing his parents' struggle gave him the motivation to push his academic career to new heights. He selected Miami due to its powerhouse reputation in the academic fields, retaining students and professors who he believe will challenge his cognitive skills.

"Our view of race, socioeconomics and background tends to affect us as individuals. Many African Americans fall victim to social stereotypes and, even though blacks in this country face obstacles, it should never be an excuse for holding back. I chose not to be a victim of my circumstances. Although my parents never attended college that should never be an excuse for me not to succeed. Although the statistics say that young black males have a diminished chance of success, I prove them wrong every day."

Lysa Vola

Hometown: Jensen Beach, FL

College/University attending: Williams College, '13



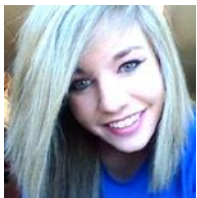
Adopted at the age of five along with five of her siblings, Lysa has overcome many hardships including her dad becoming disabled, her parents' divorcing and filing bankruptcy, and the necessity to predominantly raise her younger sibling while juggling her academics and extracurricular activities. Despite these challenges, Lysa has excelled academically and is attending Williams College with the hope of one day becoming a pediatrician.

"I never pictured high end colleges to be affordable for my family. I always had the drive to succeed in reaching all of my goals; I just lacked the financial assistance in doing so."

Madison Zollner

Hometown: Marthasville, MO

College/University attending: Missouri University of Science and Technology, '15



Growing up with a parent with a disability, Madison had to take on the role of an adult at a very early age. Despite working 30+ hours a week, taking college level classes and participating in after school activities, Madison maintained a 3.9 GPA throughout high school. Madison hopes to continue to use her love of learning and the support of her parents as encouragement as she begins to attend Missouri University of Science and Technology

"My mother set up a school in our basement when I was four years old. I went to Kindergarten knowing the alphabet, numbers and how to read and write-but most importantly, I knew the value of learning and I knew school was going to be fun. My mother instilled in me that I could do whatever my heart desired, as long as I worked hard in school and went to some place called "college.""

Minh Ngoc Nguyen

Hometown: Leslie, GA

College/University attending: Yale University, '15



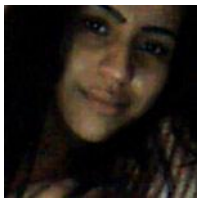
Born in Vietnam and coming to the States at the age of 10, Minh was not too fond of her new home. However, she managed to excel academically even when she had to help her parents and brother tend to their farm. As a first generation college student and self-proclaimed movie buff, Minh will head to Yale University this fall.

"Of course, I would not be where I am today without the wonderful "support system" that is my family, friends, teachers, and LEDA (summer program for students of underrepresented backgrounds at colleges in America). They believed in me when I was too chicken to believe in myself."

Nahomi Velasquez

Hometown: Fresh Meadows, NY

College/University attending: Boston University, '15



Born and raised in Queens, New York, Nahomi grew up in a traditional Hispanic household. She has strong admiration for her mother, a single parent, and aspires to be as much of a hard worker as her mother is. Growing up in a poverty stricken neighborhood and living with the absence of her father, Nahomi used those negative factors to be her motivation to excel academically, which she will continue to do as she attends Boston University.

"By definition an opportunity is a chance, even perhaps a risk. I think you should take a chance on me because I am a very determined, high motivated and responsible individual. Although I have faced several obstacles growing up, those obstacles have never impeded my development as a person and have never prevented me from achieving my goals."

[Rodney Savannah](#)

Hometown: Los Angeles, CA

College/University attending: University of Southern California, '15



Originally from Los Angeles, CA, Rodney had to overcome several misfortunes experience by him and his family. Rodney decided to focus on school and has been a stellar student in high school. Attending University of Southern California, Rodney plans to excel academically so that he can be a great role model for his younger sisters.

“College to me means a new beginning. It is the chance to erase all my past misfortunes and make a better life for my family and me. My ultimate goal though is to start my own scholarship foundation that offers not only financial assistance, but also mentorship and support to the youth of my community. I will not base my success primarily on how much I have accomplished, but on how many people I have helped obtain a college education as well.”

[Seanna Leath](#)

Hometown: North Little Rock, AR

College/University attending: Pomona College, '13



Originally from North Little Rock, AR, Seanna has traveled close to 2000 miles to attend Pomona College in California, where she plans to expand upon her love of science and medicine in her goal to improve her family's life as well as the condition of countless others.

“I feel the next step in advancing my life experience is my journey to college. While high school has set the foundation for my thirst in learning, college is the next phase: the sunrise on my horizon.”

[Shaun Devlin](#)

Hometown: Canton, IL

College/University attending: Washington and Lee University, '14



Born amidst thousands of acres of cornfields in central Illinois, Shaun possesses an interested in learning and seeing new things. She is attending Washington and Lee University, where she plans to double major in Politics and Spanish, followed by law school and a career in law or politics with an emphasis in humanitarianism.

“Born and raised in a small town in central Illinois, I was expected to follow in my father's footsteps: graduate from the local community high school, settle down in a modest house down the street, and be content with whatever work I could find in the midst of a thousand acres of cornfields.

While I respected my father, I also knew that I would always be looking for a more exciting lifestyle; I yearned to know a world guided by intellect and experience.”

[Sophia Horn](#)

Hometown: Whittier, CA

College/University attending:



Sophia grew up with a strong Native American background. Unfortunately, her father's struggle with alcoholism resulted in his separation from her family and necessitated her mother taking on two jobs. To further assist her family, Sophia worked 45 hours a week while juggling her schoolwork. She is interested in pursuing sports journalism.

“Every year a new struggle appears, from abuse to financial downfalls; the possibilities for life conflicts are endless. Struggles will always appear; if they are ignored they will constantly return. I am proud to say I do not fall into the stereotype of a victim. Instead of viewing hardships as a

burden, I believe they are a form of education; because mistakes will always be made, but the defining point is if one learns from them.”

Tereza Ponce de Leon

Hometown: Saint Paul, MN

College/University attending: Augsburg College, '13



When Tereza got pregnant in high school, she refused to let her pregnancy and the subsequent birth of her son hinder her pursuit of being the first among her family to go to college. She is excited to attend Augsburg and is ready to take on the challenge of balancing being both a young mother and a college student.

"When I got pregnant I could have taken the easy way out and switched to an alternative learning school for pregnant teens my senior year but I didn't. I'm proud of myself for how I was able to do well in school and didn't try to use having a baby as an excuse to do poorly. I knew that doing well in school would not only help me, but also my son. I used him as my motivation to work harder."