43 Students Living with HIV Receive Scholarships for their Education

July 29, 2020 By The HIV League

The HIV League, a nonprofit organization working to empower the HIV community through scholarship, wellness, and education, just selected twelve students as their 2020 cohort of Scholars to receive an HIV League Scholarship. The HIV League also implemented the COVID-19 HIV League Micro-Scholarship, a needs-based scholarship opportunity, and 31 students living with HIV have been selected to receive a $1,000 scholarship for their Fall 2020 semester studies. These 43 Scholars have shown how promising they are as students living with HIV through their educational accomplishments, leadership, and service.

By implementing the only national scholarship for students living with HIV, The HIV League naturally works to bring higher educational equity among students who are a part of this community. Because of the many intersectionalities individuals in the HIV community hold, the HIV League Scholarship also works to bring higher educational equity among LGBTQIA2S+ students, students who identify as a woman, and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People Of Color) students as well. To date, The HIV League has supported 57 students living with HIV with $186,000 of scholarship monies from Fall 2017-Spring 2022, and among those 57 students, over 71% identify as BIPOC.

The HIV League is ecstatic to work with the 2020 HIV League Scholarship and COVID-19 Micro-Scholarship recipients who have already shown an unlimited amount of potential as leaders in their local communities, the global community, as well as the HIV community. Please read more about them below along with visiting www.hivleague.org to learn more about The HIV League and their scholarship for students living with HIV.

2020 HIV League Scholars who are full-time students who will be receiving $7,000 over the course of two years

Charisse Ahmed – Philadelphia, PN – University of Pennsylvania

Charisse Ahmed is a PhD student at the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing. Her research focuses on the implementation of interventions to improve health outcomes among adolescents living with HIV in Eswatini. Charisse received her first Bachelor's degree in Health Education at the University of Florida (UF) in 2015 and her second Bachelor's degree in Nursing at the University of Pennsylvania in 2018. Since 2013, Charisse has been involved in HIV advocacy work on the domestic and international level, from providing HIV/AIDS education to high school and college students, organizing community-based HIV prevention and testing events, conducting HIV socio-behavioral research, to attending national and international HIV conferences and meetings with

policymakers to advocate for the needs of young people living with HIV.

After graduating from UF, Charisse worked at the National Institutes of Health where she conducted HIV and Hepatitis C research, and later conducted her own HIV research in Eswatini as a Fulbright grantee before starting nursing school. After completing her PhD, Charisse plans on pursuing a career as a nurse scientist to improve healthcare access and quality among underserved populations across the globe.

Charisse enjoys traveling, West African dance, and living out her Christian faith. Charisse has a passion to empower young women and girls, and previously mentored adolescent girls living with HIV. She would like to use her research to advocate for the health and well-being of marginalized and vulnerable populations, and thus promote health policy change to meet their needs.

Anthony Anderson – College Park, MD – Tulane University

Anthony graduated from Georgetown University in 2019 with a Bachelor of Arts in African American Studies. During his time on campus, he advocated on behalf of people living with HIV through various forms of education. Anthony continues his HIV advocacy as the Program Coordinator of Prevention at NMAC. Along with this, he is a member of the National Youth Forum on Homelessness where he advocates for sustainable laws that empower youth experiencing homelessness.

In his free time, Anthony loves to cook, hike, listen to music, and spend time with loved ones. He is so excited to be attending Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine where he will be receiving his Master's of Public Health.

Chris Collins – Tallahassee, FL – Florida State University

Chris is a second-year PhD student in Social Work at Florida State University. He holds a Master's degree in Social Work and professional licensure as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) in the state of Florida. His current research focuses on violence against women perpetrated by involuntary celibates, extreme risk protection orders ("red flag" laws), and underreporting of hate crimes perpetration.

In 2018, Chris was awarded the honor of "Distinguished Young Alumni" by the Florida State University College of Social Work in recognition of his outstanding contribution to society through professional and personal excellence.

Chris holds leadership positions in several Florida State University groups, including both the doctoral student organization and the Diversity and Inclusion in Research and Teaching Organization. Locally, he is involved in the Citizen Advisory Council, a Tallahassee Police Department workgroup aimed at enhancing public safety and reducing crime. Chris has also served on the Board of Directors for the Florida chapter of the National Association of Social Worker, as well as Integrity Tallahassee, an organization that strives for inclusion and LGBTQ representation within the Episcopal faith.

Personally, Chris resides in Tallahassee with his fiancé and their three dogs. Chris enjoys experiencing all of the beauty North Florida has to offer, so he can frequently be found on long walks outdoors, hiking through the woods, or at one of the many local festivals Tallahassee is known for.

Chris is grateful for the opportunity to be an HIV League Scholar and to continue to raise awareness around HIV.

Hunter Drake – St. Petersburg, FL – University of South Florida

Hunter is beginning the second year of his PhD program in Public Health with a specialization in Community and Family Health at the University of South Florida. His prior academic pursuits led to a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and a Master of Arts in Psychological Sciences with a focus in Experimental Psychology. Hunter currently serves as a graduate research assistant and holds a data analysis position at the USF Health Department of Pediatric Infectious Disease. His graduate assistantship work is contributing to a study on a smoking cessation e-health intervention for people living with HIV. He has also enjoyed the opportunity to teach Health Psychology and Psychology of Gender as an adjunct professor at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg.

Hunter feels it is essential to give back to the community that has provided him with so much opportunity. To this end, he serves as the research manager for the REACH Youth Center at the

University of South Florida St. Petersburg, working with youth living with HIV. He has been the project manager/study coordinator for the USF Bijou and DeCIDER studies. USF Bijou addressed the efficacy of a program designed to provide accurate health education through an e-Health behavior and risk reduction intervention. The DeCIDER study is looking at an intervention to examine the decisional capacity of youth living with HIV to participate in research.

He shares his life with his partner Craig and two Jack Russell Terriers, Loki and Freja. Hunter is proud and humbled to be an HIV League Scholar.

Chris – Full-Time Cybersecurity Student – Central Florida

Chris is currently part of the Honors Program at the college he attends. Chris plans to complete his Associate of Arts in Spring and matriculate to a four-year university to major in cyber security. Chris is a vibrant person, who strives to bring humor and light to conversations and relationships. He was a class president, an athlete, and a thespian before heading to college the first time. He has previously volunteered at with hospitals, parks, meal programs, and community shelters.

He is also a formerly incarcerated student. While incarcerated he became involved in education and instruction. Chris influenced others to become empowered learners and work towards their GED, thereby equipping them with the tools required to move forward positively after their release. He had ample opportunity to share about the diversities in sex, gender, and sexuality. During incarceration, he became involved with a higher education in prison program, and changed the trajectory of his life. After release, he returned to college and earned a spot on the President's List.

Chris's personal experiences with HIV and incarceration have motivated him to focus his research and volunteering efforts on underserved and underrepresented communities. He is interested in education, technology, criminal justice reform, intersectionality, inclusion, and the reduction of HIV-related stigma.

Although this is the first semi-public sharing of his HIV status, he has assisted numerous people with connecting to essential resources for people living with HIV. He has proudly been a part of various fundraisers and events for HIV/AIDS research throughout his state.

He is extremely grateful to be an HIV League Scholar and cannot wait to pursue his passions.

Full-Time Art History Student – New York, NY

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Full-Time Medical Student – Washington, DC

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Full-Time Medical Student – Western Ohio

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2020 HIV League Scholars who are full-time students and will be receiving $3,500 over the course of one year

Kevin Graves – Los Angeles, CA – University of Southern California

Kevin is a second-year Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT) master's student at the University of Southern California, where he is a Topping, AHEC, and Dean's Scholar and holds Kappa Delta Pi and Psi Chi honors. He works as an MFT trainee at Pelican Cove Counseling Centers, providing long-term psychotherapy to low-and-no-income individuals, couples, and families in East Los Angeles.

Kevin grew up in the Midwest and South during the initial AIDS crisis. As he struggled to come to terms with being gay, non-binary, and low-income, he stopped attending classes and failed out of college. He moved to New York to explore his queer identities and work as a DJ, music producer, and label manager. He created official remixes for Adele and Sia, DJ'ed Madonna's tour afterparty,

co-founded NYC’s Dance Music Invasion festival, and was a resident DJ on Fire Island.

Yet these accolades rang hollow; too many queer youth of color are left behind. They face structural stigma and entrenched barriers to mental healthcare access. Determined to help improve these outcomes, Kevin returned to college to become a therapist and advocate. He studied at LaGuardia Community College and matriculated to Columbia University, where he graduated magna cum laude with a B.A. in Psychology. He co-founded Columbia’s Recovery Coalition, was Secretary of GS Alliance, served on the JED Substance Use and Science Core committees, and was a delegate to the Ivy Leadership, 1vyG, and Ivy Mental Health conferences. He also supported TGE youth and their families as a Gender and Family Project intern, worked as a peer advisor and Spanish tutor, and served as an HIV peer advocate.

Kevin is a Peter Awn Scholar and a Truman and Fulbright finalist. He enjoys DJing, iced coffee, hikes with his roomie and her pup, advocating for equity, and being a guncle.

Martez Smith – Brooklyn, NY – University of Rochester

Martez is a doctoral candidate in Nursing and Health Science at the University of Rochester School of Nursing. He holds a Bachelor of Social Work from Ohio State University and a Master of Social Work from Long Island University Brooklyn. His research interests include addressing racial, sexual and gender minority health disparities through community-driven, asset-based interventions. In addition to conducting research, Martez works alongside a nationwide cadre of activists, organizing for social justice with the Keeping Ballroom Community Alive Network (KBCAN), which he co-founded in 2015.

Since 2010, Martez has worked on numerous health and social welfare initiatives, starting as a HIV case management intern in his hometown of Columbus, Ohio. Martez has since worked as a HIV test counselor, research assistant/coordinator on HIV and sexual health studies, consultant on national and state HIV awareness campaigns, and aided with the startup of the Office of Supportive/Affordable Housing and Services (OSAHS), an innovative initiative to procure 15,000 units of supportive housing in NYC. These experiences led to his role as the Community Co-Chair of the Ending The Epidemic Task Force Black MSM Subcommittee, leading the implementation of recommendations to improve HIV care continuum outcomes for Black MSM across New York State.

In his spare time, Martez enjoys traveling, reading, cooking and spending time with family. He has also participated in the house/ballroom community since 2009, currently a member of the House of Xclusive-Lanvin in mainstream ballroom and a member of the House of Hua Mulan in Kiki ballroom.

Full-Time Social Work Student – Baltimore, MD

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2020 HIV League Scholars who are part-time students and will be receiving $1,500 over the course of one year

Keisuke Lee-Miyaki – San Francisco, CA – Graduate Theological Union

Keisuke Lee-Miyaki was born and raised in Tokyo, Japan, who's ordained by Hongwanji, Kyoto, in 2006 as a Pure Land Buddhist Priest, and endorsed by Buddhist Churches of America in 2018, as a Minister's Assistant. Following the first unit of Clinical Pastoral Education at California Pacific Medical Center in 2015, he completed his CPE residency 2017-2018 at the Oncology/Hematology Unit of UCSF Medical Center. Currently, he is working at Sojourn Chaplaincy at Zuckerberg San

Francisco General Hospital and Trauma Center for providing emotional/spiritual care to staff and the most vulnerable population in the city. His primary practice is deep listening and sutra chanting meditation. He holds a Master of Arts, Pure Land Buddhist Studies from Ryukoku University in Kyoto and currently pursuing a certificate from the Buddhist Chaplaincy program at Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley.

A diagnosis of HIV in 2012 changed his life. He struggled with his internalized homophobia, cultural and linguistic barriers, and his grief. He found community support and acceptance from Positive Force at San Francisco AIDS Foundation and the Japanese American Buddhist Communities, his life started to change. He decided to advocate as a public example of Asian LGBTQ+ immigrants and to fight against stigma. He often speaks about his experience as a gay Asian immigrant and a Buddhist's perspective on HIV and LGBTQ+ issues in the Bay Area and Kyoto. His life experience and lecture broadcasted in over 40 local newspapers in Japan. Sometimes he is also volunteering to advocate HIV prevention at local gay bars through Connection, San Francisco Community Health Center.

COVID-19 HIV League Micro-Scholarship recipients who are full-time or part-time students and will be receiving $1,000 for the Fall 2020 semester

Brandyn D. – Norwalk, CA – Cypress College

Brandyn is a computer science major looking to get into computer programming. He enjoys traveling and cooking along with all things tech. Brandyn looks forward to making the world a better place through his future computer programming career.

Christopher Garcia – San Antonio, TX – San Antonio College

Christopher Garcia is starting his second year as a full-time student at San Antonio College in San Antonio, Texas. He was born and raised in the city and knows the city streets well as well as the

good people who are struggling a bit. He is majoring in Social Work and is working toward his goal of having a career serving people experiencing homelessness while advocating for them as well. He aspires to work in the field and defend for the rights of San Antonians who are destitute. He is excited for the future and excited for change.

Alejandro Gonzalez-Caceres – North Miami, FL – Florida International University

Alejandro is pursuing a Bachelor’s degree in Mathematical Sciences at Florida International

University. His future goals and interests include obtaining a Master's degree in Mathematical Sciences so he can contribute to the education of future generations as an educator. He's also looking to get involved in LGBTQ+ related organizations and groups at FIU by contributing to the social services and programs that help to reduce discrimination on campus, promote awareness and education, and working with LGBTQ+ students one-on-one so they can reach their goals and enhance their full potential!

James P. Marshall, "JP" – Bend, OR – Oregon State University-Cascades

JP is an environmental science major with a focus on sustainability and conservation. JP founded a student-centered sustainability initiative that focuses on the social dimension of sustainability and brings attention to social justice issues in his community. JP has worked as an ally for the LGBTQ+ community and continues to advocate for greater equity and inclusion on the OSU-Cascades

campus.

Justin O. – Los Angeles, CA – Santa Monica College

Justin is currently living in beautiful Los Angeles, and couldn’t be happier. Moving here has been extremely important for his mental, physical, and emotional strength. His favorite activities include making music and going for runs with his dog. Justin is looking forward to another chance to pursue his education further.

Bert Joseph Partin – Portland, OR – Portland Community College

Bert Partin is a first-generation college student at Portland Community College majoring in General Studies and hopes to transfer to Portland State University where he will pursue his Bachelor's degree in Social Work. He is also working to earn a Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselor certificate and hopes to work with native and queer youth. Bert is a two-spirit member of the Aamjiwnaang First Nation Tribe from Sarnia Ontario. In his free time Bert enjoys bike riding, attending recovery meetings, going to pow-wows, and volunteering for Cascade AIDS Project.

Kara R. – Northern California – Sierra College

Kara has been accepted into a nursing program this fall. She currently cares for hospice patients and their families. Kara hopes to pursue DNA research into health issues her patients face to help future generations, as a whole family, life-span approach to treatment. Her ultimate goal is clinical research and community health as a nurse practitioner. After losing her husband four years ago to hepatitis and her fiancé to cancer two years ago, she has a drive and passion for helping others and finding solutions from people's struggles. Kara is a 40-year-old single mother of 3 children. In her spare time, she volunteers as a mentor to help other women overcome life-destabilizing situations.

Alan Speer – Dallas, TX – Texas Tech University

Alan is currently pursuing his Doctorate of Pharmacy degree at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center. His professional interests center around the HIV/AIDS community, working to bring both disease management services and further expand resources to the community. He aims to provide support and confidence to both patients newly diagnosed and those already living with the condition, while promoting education and testing to the community at large.

Brandon Luke Staple – Longmont, CO – University of Colorado Denver

Brandon is a rising junior in the Pre-Med, BS/MD program at the University of Colorado-Denver. There, he has differentiated himself by tackling, important, real-world neurology and HIV undergraduate research into the use of machine learning to predict HIV care outcomes from electronic health records. Additionally, he serves as a service-leader in various HIV-related professional and community organizations as a Gilead HIV Student Ambassador and as an advocate with the AIDS Vaccine Advocacy Coalition (AVAC). In these roles, Brandon continues to make a sustainable and positive impact in the HIV/AIDS community by helping to coordinate the accelerated development and delivery of HIV prevention tools as part of an integrated response to the disease.

Lucas – Full-Time Math Student – New York, NY

Lucas is 27-years-old and a full-time sophomore at Borough of Manhattan Community College studying Math. This is his first time attending undergraduate school and he's weighing his options for where he intends on transferring in the spring after being accepted into Columbia and other CUNY schools. He's currently working as an analyst building spreadsheets for a hedge fund investor he met through walking dogs.

Rogelio – Full-Time Opera Performance Student – Seattle, WA

Unapologetically bold, loud, and proud, Rogelio is a queer Latinx, classically trained singer. An advocate for LGBTQ+ minority youth, he is currently a senior at Cornish College of the Arts. His work as an artist is innovative and strives on breaking traditional forms of classical music/opera by defying gender and ethnic norms with a methodically inclusive sense of presentation, deep metaphor, and meaning.

Shay – Full-Time Respiratory Therapy Student – Pittsburgh, PA

Shay is a full-time Respiratory Therapy student in Pittsburgh, PA. She became an EMT right out of high school and has been saving lives ever since. Shay is excited to further her studies beyond pre-hospital care, because she is needed inside the hospital now more than ever. She wants to work alongside the doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals who fight COVID-19 on the front lines. This will be the biggest challenge of he life, and she's thankful for everyone in her corner, including The HIV League. In her spare time, Shay likes to read, play the piano, and run around with her 3-legged dog, Bart.

Shekinah – Full-Time Pre-Med Student – Palmetto, FL

Shekinah is currently enrolled at State College of Florida in Bradenton, Florida as a full-time

student and she’s currently completing her Pre-Med courses. In the future, Shekinah hopes to become a Pediatric Hematologist to work with children who were born with blood diseases including HIV/AIDS. Shekinah was born with HIV and it has been a long and hard road, therefore, she knows what these kids will be going through to some extent. Her vision is that she wants to help find cures for different diseases so children can enjoy their childhood, as well as reducing the stress that these diseases will cause.

Full-Time Nursing Student – Queens, NY

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Full-Time Forensic Psychology Student – Kansas City, MO

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Full-Time Communications Studies Student – Los Angeles, CA

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Full-Time Engineering Student – Guam, USA

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Part-Time Educational Studies Student – Southern California

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Full-Time Nursing Student – Southern South Carolina

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Full-Time Education Student – Greensboro, NC

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Full-Time Natural Resources Student – Corvallis, OR

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Full-Time Mathematics and Secondary Education Student – Chicago, IL

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Full-Time Economics Student – Sacramento, CA

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Part-Time Business Student – Houston, TX

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Full-Time Neurobiology Student – Northern New Jersey

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Full-Time American Sign Language Student – Los Angeles, CA

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Full-Time IT-Web Software Development Student – Southern Wisconsin

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Full-Time Marine Science Student – St. Petersburg, FL

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Part-Time Pre-Veterinary Science Student – Austin, TX

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Full-Time Social Work Student – Southern Minnesota

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