

Culture of scholarship

Each year the University of Otago offers scholarships to the value of around \$20million, variously covering fees, accommodation, travel and associated learning and research costs to students studying at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

Some are funded by the University itself, but a large number have been donated by business and private individuals, many with alumni connections and with a strong interest in fostering excellence and diversity not only among New Zealand's next generation of professionals, but this country's future citizens as well.

Vice-Chancellor Professor Harlene Hayne believes scholarships are vital to the University, helping to attract the best and brightest students, creating a cohort of excellence that others want to join.

"I make no apologies for the fact that Otago is an academically-led university and, in recent years, we have made it both harder to get in and easier to get thrown out. We have to create an environment based on scholarship that encourages the brightest students to come here, rather than go somewhere else.

"Our scholarships programme does a pretty good job of doing this but, at the same time, the University is equally committed to providing opportunities for academic high achievers who do not have the financial resources to come here.

"We do not want financial circumstances to be a barrier to young people with potential. We want to be the best university, but accessible

to everyone. For these young people, gaining a scholarship will be a life-changing experience, as it was for me."

The young Hayne did very well academically at high school, but the private, elite liberal arts college, Colorado College, was beyond the financial means of her family. Gaining a scholarship to this institution "changed my life". Hayne spent four years there and, in September this year, the college awarded her an Honorary Doctor of Science – a neat full circle.

Hayne's comments about the importance of scholarships are echoed by OUSA president Logan Edgar. "Too often we see talent wasted when a student can't afford to come to university, even with the current Student Loans system. There are always extra expenses like travel, course material and textbooks that a scholarship can cover and really make studying a more viable option.

"And, for existing students, gaining a scholarship to pursue further study is a massive encouragement. This not only makes the decision to continue studying more appealing by making it financially easier, but also provides that boost that can keep you going, knowing that someone is backing what you do."

This is not a one-way street. Donors also receive an enormous sense of satisfaction. John Pickering, who is a trustee and secretary of the Priscilla Sandys Wunsch Scholarships, describes this role as a "privilege".

The scholarships were established by trust deed on the death of Miss Wunsch

in 2000 in memory of the years she enjoyed as a student at the University of Otago, graduating with a BA in 1945. The scholarships are for Taranaki students from families with limited resources or special needs to help them with their costs of study, accommodation and travel.

"Not only is it rewarding to ensure the investments of the trust fund are secure and grow each year so that it maintains its current level of income, there is the personal joy in knowing that so many enthusiastic local students have been given the opportunity to achieve their dreams without a huge student loan that could otherwise impede their future.

"Many of the students like to keep in contact. They are proud of their Otago degree and grateful for the financial support they received from the Priscilla Sandys Wunsch Trust as they know they would not be in the position they are today without that help."

The University of Otago currently offers scholarships to foster undergraduate and postgraduate study across all academic disciplines. In addition, there are scholarships that encourage and recognise particular talents – such as in cultural pursuits – specific areas of expertise, ethnic diversity and for those with disabilities.

To contribute to the University's scholarships programme, a number of options are available. For further information, please contact the Development and Alumni Relations Office:

Tel +64 3479 4516
Email alumni@otago.ac.nz
<http://alumni.otago.ac.nz>

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“My scholarship was amazing and gave me a great head-start at University. It meant that during my first and second years I didn’t have to work part-time to pay for the cost of rent and living at a Residential College. Instead, I was able

to concentrate on my studies and achieved exceptional results. And this high academic achievement subsequently provided me with numerous postgraduate scholarship opportunities, as well.

“Post-university life is now so much easier as the scholarships have meant that after completing an honour’s degree in biochemistry and a PhD, my student loan is less than the cost of one degree!”

Gemma Dickson, Priscilla Sandys Wunsch Scholarship

“The scholarship was a bonus in my first year of University to feel that people believed in me and were prepared to support me through my study. I certainly felt relieved and grateful that my future loan obligations would be reduced. This helped me to focus on doing the courses I enjoyed most, which was really useful in my first year as I tightened up exactly what degree structure I wanted to pursue.

“The scholarship certainly helped me on my way to choosing and graduating with an LLB (Hons) and a BA in politics which led me, during University, to summer-clerk work experience with law firm Russell McVeagh and, after graduating, a position clerking for Judges in the Court of Appeal and Supreme Court in Wellington. I am now just beginning my study towards an LLM at the New York University School of Law, and am thankful for all the help I received getting here.”

Alex Latu, Alumni Scholarship

“The scholarship I received enabled me to achieve my goal of completing a Bachelor of Commerce and Bachelor of Science in just 3½ years, without any financial pressure. It gave me the best experience of university life I could ever have imagined.

“As a result of the scholarship, I didn’t need a student loan and was able to save some money from my part-time job as a



tutor and residential assistant in a residential college, and now run my own small business. Without this scholarship I wouldn’t be where I am today.”

Sok Phou, First in Family Scholarship

“Being a fortunate recipient of a University of Otago scholarship has enabled me to more easily focus on both the coursework processes and research dissertation requirements of a Master’s Degree in Physiotherapy (endorsed in Manipulative) which I was recently awarded with Distinction. It has also this enabled me to light a way for the many bright Māori into tertiary education, particularly a career path in physiotherapy – currently, fewer than four per cent of all registered physiotherapists in Aotearoa identify as Māori. This is cornerstone to the aspirations I have for our people, and which will ultimately assist in enhancing the wellness of our whānau.



“Looking forward, I can now see a career path beyond my current clinical role ... into one of academia at one of Aotearoa’s most prestigious universities, a role I had previously thought was beyond this Tāne Māori from the bush.”

Ricky Bell (Ngā Puhi, Ngāti Hine, Ngāti Hau), Coursework Master’s Scholarship

“I am currently a second-year French and theatre studies student, and this year I was accepted into the prestigious British American Drama Academy’s Midsummer in Oxford Program 2012. This is a highly selective – by audition – intensive acting conservatory run by the Yale University School of Drama and UCLA, and held at Magdalen College Oxford in July/August. The focus was on classical acting and Shakespeare, taught by leading British and American theatre practitioners.

“I was the only actor representing New Zealand and the experience I gained was invaluable in my pursuit of a career in the theatre. This opportunity was absolutely amazing and I remain grateful to the University of Otago for my first-year scholarship which, no doubt, played a supporting role in my acceptance to the Oxford programme.”

Aislinn Furlong, Performance Scholarship

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