When Daniel Ewnetu and his parents first learned of Rainier Scholars in the 4th grade, he was, in a word, “hooked.” Hooked by the academic rigor and knowing he would be challenged.

In describing the Academic Enrichment Phase he remembers, “Academically, I was really just broken down and rebuilt. I figured out what kind of studying worked for me, how to handle an unmanageable load of work – how to efficiently relax.” He explains, “The way we did it was to make a hard line separating work and play. Go outside, play hard and then come back in to class and work.”

Inspired by a summer spent at Phillips Exeter Academy, a prestigious preparatory school in New Hampshire, Daniel applied to high school at Oregon Episcopal School (OES), a private boarding school in Oregon. According to Daniel, his parents, while somewhat hesitant with his decision, did “agree that, for me, learning independence at a younger age would be a good idea.”

And it was. Not only did Daniel receive his sophomore class’s highest honor, the coveted Patty Jeanne Semura Award, as the student who best embodied the characteristics and qualities of integrity, leadership and compassion for others, he also went on to become student body president.

During his summer breaks, Daniel took the opportunity to gain valuable work experience through several internships. He was an analyst for the Microsoft Office 365 Revenue Team and worked on several projects for Transportation Choices Coalition related to the growing electric vehicle market.

Daniel now plans to take these new skills with him as he pursues his business interests next year at Northwestern University, one of the most selective schools in the country, where he was accepted early decision. It was as if he had a formula in his head:

"With hard work comes opportunity.
With opportunity comes responsibility.
With responsibility comes independence.

That may sound, well, a bit too formulaic, but it reflects who Daniel is – a young man sure of himself, and aware of the world around him. Asked what he learned early on at Rainier Scholars, he says it was about “a higher mannerism, a level of formality.” An attitude apparent in the basic etiquette of the classroom. That is, if you were not paying attention, there was a very good chance you were missing out on something very important – an outcome that does not fit into Daniel’s formula for success.
A Place of Gladness

By Tom Moore

Monica Parker loves to read. As a child growing up in Georgia, she was a member of a book club and would receive a set of books every month. The unbridled joy of seeing them piled in a stack, and even their smell, stays with her today. She also had a tendency to “borrow” her older brothers’ books, such as The Hardy Boys, Tom Swift and her favorite, The Great Brain, a series about “a super smart kid who would get into all kinds of adventure and trouble.”

Like her childhood heroes, Monica is smart – smart enough to get into Harvard University twice – once as an undergraduate and again as a law school student. She’s also adventurous – willing to follow her passions into roles like reading screenplays for Spike Lee to being a Lecturer on Law at Harvard Law School to a career coach and author of two books. Unlike her fictional friends who sometimes get into trouble, Monica’s talents are in helping individuals and organizations progress and flourish. Whether working the legal side of conflict resolution, writing books to help lawyers explore careers outside the law or help women of color lawyers thrive within their profession, Monica loves to do her research and come up with new ideas.

Despite these career accomplishments, not long after moving to Seattle from Atlanta, Monica felt something was missing in her life. In the self-exploration that followed, she discovered the writings of theologian Frederick Buechner and was particularly affected by his passage: “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” She knew her “deep gladness” came from her ability to help people through strategic planning and professional development. And upon looking deeper into the field of education, it was not long before Rainier Scholars, and the “hunger,” came into focus. She says, “What drew me to Rainier Scholars was its reputation and the opportunity to have a deep and meaningful impact on the lives of children of color.”

The connection was made. She had arrived at the intersection where her abilities, and just as importantly, her life experience, met Rainier Scholars’ mission. As one of only three African Americans in her high school class, she remembers feeling “a sense of isolation” – a burden she would carry with her through her years of schooling. Fortunately, her parents, as she recalls, “spent time working with me, not just academically, but building up my confidence that I could do whatever I wanted to do – no matter what the environment.”

Now, as the Associate Executive Director at Rainier Scholars, Monica Parker has the opportunity to pass on that ability, her place of deep gladness, to the staff, community partners and most importantly, to the students.
Taking Control
By Tom Moore

Miles Welsh (Cohort IV) is a Lakeside School and Marist College graduate who currently works as an IT Analyst in the Technical Development Department of Liberty Mutual/Safeco Insurance.

Graduating with a Bachelor of Science degree, he loves computer programming and plans to start his own video game company.

Miles’s passion for technology can, in part, be traced back to the triumvirate of an oratory, The Odyssey, and Mr. Drego Little, a Literature teacher at Rainier Scholars. It is an association not as unusual as it might appear. Every Rainier Scholar reads, and reflects on, The Odyssey taught by Mr. Little in the Academic Enrichment Program. Each scholar also delivers oratories by memory from a text of their choosing in front of an audience. Miles chose a section from The Odyssey and remembers it as one of his best experiences at Rainier Scholars.

“When you memorize something, you’re able to ruminate on it, and really understand. And then, during my presentation, I could see the audience was really listening. That is a powerful feeling.” Fast forward a decade and Miles has found a connection with programming that is not dissimilar. He reflects, “When you’re coding it is very meticulous and detail oriented. You see the functionality the user wants, and you make it work. It is a great sense of accomplishment and control.”

Self-control and accountability, to yourself and to those around you, are standards that Miles learned from his family, Rainier Scholars and life experience. He takes ownership for times when he underperformed, when he wasn’t motivated to do the work. “Those times are on me,” he says. “I wasn’t doing what I needed to do to be successful. I was kind of lost at one point.”

Every student, everybody, has places and times when they feel out of control. For Miles, the network of support created by Rainier Scholars through the years was critical in keeping him moving forward. “When I didn’t want to continue, I had mentors surrounding me – Bob, Jolenta, Pedro, Ms. Smith, Doug – who motivated me. So, I kept pushing myself and, ultimately, was rewarded for the work I put in. If you work hard, there’s nothing you cannot accomplish.”

Now, at the ripe old age of 22, Miles dreams of giving back. When he starts that video game company he is going to be looking for interns and employees from the cohort ranks of Rainier Scholars. As he says, “How can you not help another kid coming up? That is totally exciting. I can’t wait to see what happens.”

Neither can we Miles, neither can we.
In a conversation with a young Rainier Scholars alumna the other day, as we pondered her future career plans, we stumbled upon the most essential of questions: what makes for a meaningful and purpose-driven career choice? What makes one get out of bed each day, excited for what they are heading off to do? The answer obviously differs for all of us, and our chat provided an opportunity for me to ask myself that same question: What, after 17 years with this organization, provides that surge which leaves me thinking every day that there is no place I would rather be than here at Rainier Scholars?

The part of this job that never gets old lies at the core of our mission, and is about to hit its peak season in the coming weeks. Our scholars of all ages will see their hard work and commitment come to fruition through acceptances and accomplishments of all kinds: a letter from the Seattle School District indicating admission into the Highly Capable program for 7th grade, independent school admissions around the region for a group of 9th graders, college acceptances at schools around the country for our 12th graders, news of first jobs procured and graduate school funding secured for our college seniors and young alumni.

While the accomplishment embodied in these moments is part of the joy, it is what each one symbolizes that most inspires me: that with a tremendous amount of effort, sacrifice and commitment from scholars, families and staff, access to education and opportunity are attainable. It is hard to overstate the profound change in a scholar’s trajectory that comes with any of these “good news moments” each spring. It is equally hard to overestimate the impact on our larger society when our scholars seize these opportunities.

At the end of the educational pathway, our scholars land in a place where they can respond to the question for themselves as to what makes for a meaningful and purpose-driven life... makes for a meaningful and purpose-driven life, and have the experience, skills and credentials to answer it in any way they want.

Our April 25th Luncheon, with the theme of Where Hope and Hard Work Meet Access and Opportunity, will provide a chance to celebrate the many milestone moments and accomplishments of our scholars. I hope each of you will be able to join us.

Thank you for your ongoing support which helps create this access and opportunity for all.

Sarah Smith, Executive Director
Welcome Board Members

Dave Cotter is a high-tech entrepreneur and CEO of ReplyYes, the leading message-based commerce platform. As co-founder of SquareHub and Mpire Corporation, he has also held a number of top management positions at software companies including Microsoft, RealNetworks and Amazon.

He is a strong advocate for access and opportunity for students of color in education as well as leadership roles in the professional world—especially in technology. Dave most recently has raised visibility around this issue through interviews with publications like *GeekWire*.

“What drew me to Rainier Scholars is my passion for seeing all students and working professionals excel based on their abilities and talent. In today’s world, there are still obvious gaps and the playing field isn’t level. I hope to continue working toward a stronger and more inclusive vision of what is possible.”

Dave resides in Seattle and is the father of three daughters.

Martha Bejar is co-Founder/CEO of Red Bison Advisory Group, LLC. Red Bison identifies opportunities with proven enterprises in China, the Middle East, and the United States. She brings a wealth of experience, the ability to drive and support innovation, and a strong track record of leadership with some of the world’s leading global corporations.

“I care deeply about the power of education to transform lives. Rainier Scholars brings together a unique blend of educational access and opportunity for students of color that is so important today.”

Martha is the recipient of numerous industry awards including: Top 50 Hispanic Women in the United States by *Hispanic Inc. Business Magazine*, and the Hispanic Business Media’s award for the 2008 Woman of the Year and the Visionary Award from LISTA (Latinos in Information Sciences and Technology Association).

Martha resides in the Seattle area with her family.

Program Updates

Recruitment
• Over 600 applications received with nearly 300 applicants interviewed across grades 4 and 5 as part of our scholar selection process.
• In a unique transition year, we will accept 45 rising 5th and 45 rising 6th graders to support our move to a one-year earlier start.

Academic Enrichment
• 59 Cohort XV students continue in our Academic Enrichment Phase, representing 94% retention on a starting class of 63.
• 84% of Cohort XV students and families submitted independent school applications and eagerly await admissions decision.

Academic Counseling and Support Services (ACSS)
• High level of participation and engagement for Saturday events, bi-weekly reading seminars, and spring Computer Science coding class at Amazon.
• Focus on summer program applications for scholars, requiring travel “outside of comfort zones,” with options ranging from soccer/service trips in Peru to East Coast summer boarding school experiences.

Leadership Development (LD)
• ACT prep class for juniors, summer internship applications in process, and successful LD retreats during mid-winter break.
• College admissions in process: Scholars have recently gained early decision acceptance to an impressive list of colleges including Northwestern, Scripps, Oberlin, Pitzer, Smith and Northeastern.

College Support
• Our team continues to provide safety net support and career guidance to hundreds of scholars spread over 57 campuses in 13 states.
• 60-70 college students are in our summer internship pool, eager to be matched with an experience that aligns with their fields of study.
Where Hope and Hard Work Meet Access and Opportunity

Our signature fundraising event celebrates college admissions and our 2017 college graduates

Rainier Scholars Annual Luncheon

Tuesday, April 25, 2017
Registration 11:30 am | Lunch 12–1:30 pm

Sheraton Seattle Grand Ballroom
1400 Sixth Avenue

The vision of Rainier Scholars is one of breaking barriers, that with opportunity and education our scholars can truly grow into the leaders of tomorrow, and that our democracy and society will be all the stronger for their presence.

Sarah Smith | Executive Director

Colleges and Universities with 2017 Rainier Scholars Graduates

Carnegie Mellon University
Claremont McKenna College
Dartmouth College
Davidson College
Evergreen State College
Harvard University
Johns Hopkins University
Kalamazoo College
Macalester College
Occidental College
Seattle University
St. Olaf College
Tufts University
Union College
University of Southern California
University of Washington
Western Washington University
Yale University

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Sarah Smith | Executive Director