



Rainier Scholars board member Mindy Mount (center) with students Tiesa McElroy and Erica Hipolito, who have worked as summer interns in Mount's department at Microsoft as part of the nonprofit Rainier Scholars program.

Fast Facts

Organization:

Rainier Scholars, Seattle

Web Site:

www.rainierscholars.org

Profile:

The Rainier Scholars program provides academic, leadership, mentoring and support programs for more than 350 minority students from the Seattle area who are in 6th grade through college.

Microsoft Support:

Microsoft and its employees have contributed more than \$250,000 in cash and in-kind donations to Rainier Scholars since 2006. Several employee volunteers have assisted the organization in areas such as board leadership, financial development, software training and student internships.

Academic Program Challenges Minority Students to Aim High

Seeing young people excel and build self-confidence is the payoff for Mindy Mount, a volunteer at Rainier Scholars.

As she watches a video of Seattle-area high school students describing what their participation in the Rainier Scholars program means to them, Mindy Mount is noticeably moved. Even though Mount has heard dozens of these stories while serving on the board of directors of this nonprofit academic and leadership organization, "it's always so inspiring to see the great things that these bright, diverse young people can achieve," she says.

"I love how Rainier Scholars helps motivate talented students to excel," adds Mount, who is corporate vice president of the Operations and Finance Group at Microsoft and chief financial officer of the Entertainment and Devices Division. "The attitude is, 'We expect you to accomplish great things, and the world is going to be a better place because you are here.'"

Founded in 2002, Rainier Scholars provides accelerated learning opportunities, leadership development experiences and support services for minority students at 50 schools in Seattle. The organization recently celebrated the high-school graduation of 40 students who have participated in the program since they were in the 6th grade. All have been accepted to four-year colleges and will continue to receive academic and career development counseling from Rainier Scholars while earning their degrees.

Rainier Scholars works with local elementary schools to identify academically motivated students of color who are nearing the end of 5th grade and

invite them to apply for the program. About 60 students are selected each year based on test scores, financial need, strength of parental support and overall commitment to working hard in school. The students take summer courses in math, science, literature, writing and other subjects prior to entering 6th grade. Throughout the next school year, they attend classes one evening a week and all day Saturday, and then they return for another summer session.

"Our instructors follow the new 'three Rs'—a rigorous curriculum, emphasizing the relevance of each lesson and the relationships between them," says Sarah Smith, Rainier Scholars associate executive director. The program also helps students apply to top private schools and to advanced-placement programs in Seattle-area public high schools.

From 7th grade through their senior year, students continue to receive academic and career counseling as well as access to tutoring, adult mentors and summer internships at Seattle-area businesses. Microsoft hosted two high-school interns in 2008 and three more in 2009.

"There has always been a strong connection between Rainier Scholars and Microsoft," says Mary Bristow, the nonprofit's director of development, adding that Microsoft and its employees have contributed more than \$250,000 to the program in the last three years. The company also donated 100 Zune® portable media players to Rainier Scholars students in 2007.

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—Mindy Mount,
treasurer and board member, Rainier Scholars

Mount, who joined Microsoft in 2006, had previously worked with a similar nonprofit academic program in New York City and wanted to stay involved with helping students after she moved to the Seattle area. "I've always felt passionate about the value of education and especially about providing opportunities for the best and brightest youth who are underprivileged," says Mount. When a Microsoft colleague told her that Rainier Scholars needed a new board member, she was quick to volunteer.

"I like that the program is very hands-on, and that it works on not only improving students' academic skills but also coaching them to develop self-confidence and become stronger leaders," says Mount. "It reaches kids at a time when they are just starting to learn the relationship between how hard you work and what you can accomplish."

In addition to serving as treasurer and finance committee chair on the Rainier Scholars board and mentoring the summer interns in her department at Microsoft, Mount helped the organization build a five-year business plan in Microsoft® Office Excel®. As part of this effort, she recruited three other Microsoft volunteers to help Rainier Scholars

Microsoft has always believed in the power of individuals to do great things, which is one reason why much of its corporate giving goes to nonprofit organizations that are important to its employees.

In Washington state, employees volunteered 222,912 hours of service and donated \$22.4 million in cash and software in fiscal year 2008 to support nonprofits in education, human services, the arts and the environment. Employees' volunteer hours, as well as donations, are matched by Microsoft, up to \$12,000 per year per employee.

In addition to its matching funds, Microsoft donated more than \$20 million in cash and software to Washington nonprofits in 2008.

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map out the program's expenses, fundraising requirements and other key budgetary considerations as it approaches full capacity of about 550 students in 2013.

"Mindy brings such a great intellect and curiosity to our board," says Smith. "She is skilled at helping to push us to think more strategically about what we do and how to make this organization better." She adds that Microsoft's involvement in the summer internship program gives students invaluable exposure to the business world.

Erica Hipolito, an incoming senior at Lakeside School, an academically challenging private school in Seattle, says interning at Microsoft in 2008 was one of her favorite experiences through Rainier Scholars. "I got to work with such smart people," says Hipolito, who helped compile market research for the Xbox® gaming group.

"Rainier Scholars was the turning point in my education and basically for my life," she says. Hipolito's parents emigrated from the Philippines and knew relatively little about available opportunities beyond regular schooling, "so it was a blessing for my family that this program found me."

A recent tour of Seattle Children's Hospital with Rainier Scholars to watch researchers perform human genome sequencing experiments has stoked Hipolito's interest in chemistry or pharmacy as a career. "Rainier Scholars has helped broaden my education a lot," she says.

Those kinds of eye-opening experiences among students are part of what makes Rainier Scholars such a unique educational asset, says Mount. Her goals as a board member include helping the organization think about how it could expand to serve more students in the area, including communities to the east of Seattle.

"When I see how happy the kids are and how incredibly grateful the parents are, I am just delighted and honored to be part of this organization," she says.

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