Sometimes, hope lives in a place that other people don’t see.”

Miguel Silva-Soria, a Rainier Scholar and a sophomore at Seattle Prep, made this sage observation in front of over 1,200 supporters in the Sheraton Grand Ballroom on April 25th. In doing so, he became a spokesperson for all low-income children of color like himself whose parents believe in their abilities and who would sacrifice everything to support their dream to become someone great despite their circumstances. As is true for so many others, he was waiting for an opportunity like Rainier Scholars “to shine a bright light on my hope.” With that light, he can now pursue his love of science, graduate from college along with his Rainier Scholars peers and fulfill his dream of becoming a doctor.

The audience’s attention was then directed to the video screen where they were introduced to Jerusalem Michael Hadush Hadgu Hailu, a graduating senior from Yale University and the daughter of Ethiopian parents who fled civil war in Africa to immigrate to the United States in the 1990s. Like her namesake city, Jerusalem believes “every difficult experience, influence and obstacle shapes the individual I will become—I will always be on a quest.” After graduation, Jerusalem will continue her studies in Arabic, return to Jordan to work with Syrian refugees, and take another step on her journey to becoming a career diplomat.

Following Jerusalem, the audience was greeted by a slideshow of recent Cohort V college graduates. Among others, there was Ellis Simani with a BA in Economics and Politics from Claremont McKenna College, J’Kela Smith, BS in Psychology and Studio Arts, Hamzah Aly, with a BS in Informatics from UW, Danait Yemane, Masters in Public Health program in Health Policy and Management from Columbia University, and Ange Clayton, a double BS in The History of Science and Cognitive Science from Harvard.

It was in this way, through the accomplishments and budding careers of these young scholars, that the theme of the luncheon—where hope and hard work meet access and opportunity—was transformed.

Just as Rainier Scholars “shines a bright light” on the hopes and dreams of its students, so do they in turn bring hope not just to those attending the Luncheon, but to all of society. Through their hard work and commitment, these Rainier Scholars are the access to, and opportunity for, a better and brighter future—one filled with diversity and possibility.

As Executive Director Sarah Smith told the assembled audience, the transformation happens, “when we begin to see these students as our future oncologist, son-in-law, congresswoman or professor; it is then when we will see no other choice but to invest in them in the way we would our own children.”

And invest they did. With the help of 46 sponsors, embodying our region’s philanthropic spirit, Rainier Scholars raised over $1.5 million to help students like Miguel, Zoe and Jerusalem become the leaders they are destined to be.
By Tom Moore

Ellis Simani of Cohort V graduated from Claremont McKenna College in May. He is currently working for The Seattle Times as a data journalist (more on that later). In the future, he would love to work at ProPublica, an independent, non-profit newsroom that produces investigative journalism in the public interest. He is thrilled to have a career where he can combine his passion for writing and his interest in economics and politics with his skills in programming and data analysis.

The path to this passion was anything but straightforward, yet from his childhood to now, one thing has remained constant: the friends he made through Rainier Scholars.

Born of an African-American mother and a Kenyan father, Ellis struggled with his bi-cultural identity. In elementary and middle school he felt his teachers did not see the potential in him that he and other adults in his life felt was there. A knee injury his freshman year at Lakeside School forced him to question his perceived place as a competitive athlete and the role sports would play in his trajectory to college.

Even at Claremont McKenna College he had a hard time figuring out what he wanted to do professionally. As he said, “I tried everything. That was my approach.” Work stints at a tech start-up and a non-profit focusing on international law did not inspire him, leaving him discouraged and daunted by the question “what is it that I can do that will have the most impact?”

It is this question—a question of leadership, responsibility and, ultimately, of self-determination—that had been the refrain of his adolescent years. It is here, in the unknowing, that we come back to Rainier Scholars. Amidst all the uncertainty, it was Rainier Scholars that fostered his nascent love of learning from when he was a child, opening up a world of experience not otherwise available to him. “I could see myself in the teachers, and they could see the potential in me. That’s where I found the most comfort—learning from a curriculum that felt more true to my experience.”

It was in middle school where his friendships solidified within his Rainier Scholars cohort. They were like-minded children who helped him make sense of his world. For Ellis, “it was helpful to have students at other schools, from other neighborhoods, who were going through similar things. We were each other’s support systems.”

Reading books about, and being amongst immigrants and immigrant families, he could, for example, identify with first-generation Latino kids, a process that helped him wrestle with his bi-cultural identity.

Leaning on, and learning from, his friends’ experiences he was able to make the switch at Lakeside from a black male with athletic potential to a student leader becoming, as he says, “an example of somebody who found other ways to excel and be acknowledged.” He started reading again and “remembered how much being a student meant to me.”

It is as if, to use the tech parlance, Ellis open-sourced his life. Using the Rainier Scholars community as the cultural equivalent of how software developers use open sourcing, he collaborated freely with his peers, shared problems, kept each other honest (and real) and, ultimately, found his own answers. There is no one operating system to life. While it is the mission of Rainier Scholars to have their students persevere, succeed, and become leaders, the future, as Ellis notes, “looks different for every person, and everyone really does have their own path.”

So maybe it was not such a big surprise that Ellis found his future career in a series of hack-a-thons he attended in college. It was there, where “web-scraping” coders gather together to uncover and provide solutions to public problems, that he first imagined a career in the field of data journalism—a place where “I get to write, I get to talk to people, I get to hack and uncover stories that make an impact. It’s everything I ever wanted.”
Both of them, however, remain realists and remind us that, in Addison’s words, “the only sure way something is going to happen is to work for it.” For Brady the notion of hope and hard work constantly remind him of his family and of “the sacrifice of time and energy he and his parents made, and still make.” In this sense, the struggle to succeed remains hard, and to survive and excel, they realize it is important not just to take care of themselves, but to also tend to those who will follow in their footsteps.

Tending to themselves, they both share a delight, and refuge, in poetry. Sports for Addison is a great “non-academic place to get my emotions out” and Brady finds the methodical nature of calligraphy, the art of making letters beautiful, calming and cathartic. Tending to others, they work to inspire, mentor and create communities that are stronger together and more aware of the challenges facing them.

A pivotal point for Brady came in his junior year after spending a semester at the School for Ethics and Global Leadership in Washington, DC.

He became active in student government and realized he could help create a place “where students have a voice and can be agents of change.” When asked what he felt his role was at the school, he said, “It’s all about the communities I involve myself in. To help keep them safe. To provide greater access and opportunity.”

Addison works as a Student Advisor mentoring the youngest of Rainier Scholars. It is an intense experience, one in which she feels “she has learned how to learn” and in turn shares her belief that “homework is actually an opportunity—an opportunity to work hard!” She also volunteers with Girls on the Run, a program that uses running and exercise to help raise the self-esteem and emotional strength of young girls who may feel marginalized.

Their self-awareness and commitment to care for others, as well as take care of themselves is not taught, it is gained through their experiences, many of which were accessed through Rainier Scholars. As Brady says, “It is this weird thing of getting older and more mature, and seeing how the world works and what its needs are. I am grateful to Rainier Scholars for catalyzing and pushing that process along.”

To provide this kind of opportunity to understand the world, and find success in it, is the mission of Rainier Scholars. For Addison and Brady, bringing others along with them on their journey and taking care of them, and their success, is what it means to be a Rainier Scholar.
Executive Director’s Perspective

Transformational Journeys

“*I don’t believe in transformational moments, as transformation is so much harder than a moment.*”

_**Hillbilly Elegy** by J.D. Vance_

At Rainier Scholars, we whole-heartedly agree with Vance’s sentiment. Thus, we make a 12-year commitment to the vision of transforming young people with great potential (but many barriers to success) into college graduates where a world of opportunity awaits. Our annual luncheon is a forum where we take time to honor significant milestones along the transformational journey. It is a joyous celebration and we are grateful that so many of you were able to join us in April.

While the luncheon is undoubtedly a highlight of the year, it is the many small moments along the way in each scholar’s journey which fill my mind and heart come graduation season. Behind each ecstatic cap and gown photo, and each sweatshirt declaring their college destination of choice, lie hundreds of instances when scholars and their families sacrificed short-term pleasure and ease for the long-term transformation of opportunity.

As we head into summer, one in which an intrepid group of young students begin this journey a full year earlier, I am struck anew by the commitment they and their families make at such a tender age. (My own son is now the age of our youngest incoming scholars and I wonder daily, “would he have it in him?”).

Not yet knowing the transformation that might be possible, our scholars and families clearly understand that it is harder than any one moment; thus, they embrace the first step in the journey. With 16 years of history under our belt at Rainier Scholars, we have the gift of having seen a multitude of transformational journeys evidenced by our college graduates now working and leading in the community. The life-changing experience offered to our youngest scholars is backed up by the discernible proof of what is possible when hope and hard work are matched by access and opportunity.

We invite you to come visit our summer program at The Bush School and witness the beginning of the twelve year transformation that lies ahead for our scholars. Our continued gratitude for your support in making this work possible.

_Sarah Smith, Executive Director_

_It is the many small moments along the way in each scholar’s journey which fill my mind and heart come graduation season._
Welcome Our Youngest Scholars Ever!

Summer Session Tours

This summer marks the beginning of our one-year-earlier start, with 5th grade being the new entry point to a now 12-year journey to college graduation.

Tour the summer session where you will see these Cohort XVII youngsters in action for the first time, along with Cohorts XVI and XV:

July 5–August 8, Tuesday–Friday at 8:30 am, The Bush School

Even if you’ve been before, we encourage a return visit. This summer promises new curriculum, new teachers and the energy of THREE cohorts of scholars who share a common goal: being the first in their family to earn a college degree.

We’re happy to save you a spot!

RSVP: drobinson@rainierscholars.org or 206.407.2147

Career Expo—Hosted by Amazon

Career & Internship Expo

Rainier Scholars announces our first-ever Career Expo, generously hosted by Amazon. On July 27, scholars in high school, college and beyond will meet dozens of employers eager to meet them, garner tips on how to make their resume or LinkedIn page pop, and get the 411 on available internship and employment opportunities.

Scholars, sign up now: rscareersupport.org/events

Rainier Scholars Program Updates

Academic Enrichment: AEP

• 57 Cohort XV scholars (a 90% retention rate) return for second summer, with 100% earning placement into independent schools or public school advanced learning programs
• Cohorts XVI and XVII, with 46 students each, begin AEP this summer, bringing total enrollment to an all-time high 149 students
• 98% of incoming students will be first in family to attend college

Academic Counseling and Support Services: ACCS

• Nearly 140 7–9th grade students complete school year, with 85% maintaining GPA of 3.0 or above
• Over 50 scholars strengthen their college readiness skills by attending summer enrichment programs near and far
• 100% enrolled in independent or public school advanced learning programs for fall 2017

Leadership Development: LD

• 135 10th-12th grade scholars wrap up school year, with nearly 80% maintaining GPA of 3.0 or above
• 100% of seniors accepted to four-year colleges including Columbia, Whitman, Brown, UW, Pomona, Seattle University and more
• Over 50 LD students placed in summer internships, ranging from Fred Hutch and Microsoft to BMGI and EnviroIssues

College Support: CS

• Scholars gain professional experience by securing summer internships in Seattle and beyond
• 87% of students from Cohorts I through V who matriculated to college have now graduated—most recently from Harvard, Johns Hopkins, Yale, Davidson, SPU and Dartmouth, among others
• Graduates beginning professional careers at companies such as Facebook, Ernst and Young, Boeing, Amazon and The Seattle Times
THANKS TO OUR 2017 RAINIER SCHOLARS ANNUAL LUNCHEON SPONSORS

Where hope and hard work meet access and opportunity

Thank you to our incredible luncheon sponsors and loyal donor community who create transformative experiences for more than 650 low-income students of color determined to be the first in their family to earn a college degree. Together, we celebrate the hope, hard work and achievement of all of our scholars, while providing access to pathways filled with opportunity.

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CUM LAUDE

HONORS

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Special thanks to our college sweatshirt sponsor: Roscoe’s Ranch – Your Dog’s Home Away from Home