



RAINIER
SCHOLARS



A Parent Perspective on Placement

Striving for Choices

By Kisa Nishimoto

To have choices is privilege; to create choices is empowerment. Rainier Scholars aims to empower families to help their children seek opportunities that offer them multiple options for a high-quality education – building on the academic development that takes place during the first 14 months in the Academic Enrichment Program (AEP).

After AEP summer classes end and the start of the school year, scholars and families are introduced to the many possibilities available in the Puget Sound area for independent schools and advanced learning programs in public schools. Dominique Daba serves as the Director of Placement at Rainier Scholars, supporting families as they research schools, prepare for testing, navigate online applications and financial aid, and evaluate their list of viable school options.

“It can be really challenging completing the application process. I try to educate parents on what questions to ask schools to help them feel empowered to advocate for themselves and their student. My greatest hope is for parents to know what they are saying “yes” to and know what they are saying “no” to, so they can make informed, authentic choices.”

– Ms. Daba, Director of Placement

For one AEP parent, Rocio Contreras, the rigors of the application process were particularly keen with her set of 6th grade twins, Geyciel and Christopher. Double the kids, double the forms! Before Rainier Scholars, private schools didn't seem accessible. But with the support and encouragement from staff and Ms. Daba, Rocio believed it was the best way to optimize educational choices for her kids.



Rocio is from El Salvador. Coming to the United States meant more possibilities for her family and for Geyciel's and Christopher's future. Back in El Salvador, Rocio attended college for a time and had hopes to become a teacher. When she came to the States, her focus shifted to providing for her kids with her husband Arturo and now supporting them on their academic journey with Rainier Scholars.

English being her second language, Rocio worked hard, with help from a friend, to complete the online application and parent essays. She took care in illustrating the individual strengths of Geyciel and Christopher and what it would mean to be accepted to these top-tier middle schools. Rocio was determined to meet every application requirement in a timely manner. She attended parent writing workshops, a financial aid workshop, researched schools online, connected with Ms. Daba when she had clarifying questions, and visited all prospective schools. She was a champion for her kids.

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The top three schools the twins applied for: University Preparatory School, The Northwest School and Seattle Academy. When asked what Rocio looked for in determining if a school is a good fit, she said, “I based it on how welcomed and included a school made me feel. It's something you can just sense. My kids and I were always aligned on that.”

Rocio shared that she is anxious to hear back from schools, but tries to keep her emotions at bay to be strong for her kids. As a family, they have proactively discussed the scenario of the twins getting accepted into different schools or none of the schools. The brother and sister duo are very close and will be happy for each other no matter what happens.

To ensure students get access to the best education available, all scholars complete testing for advanced learning programs within the public school districts. This year, 100% of the AEP scholars qualified for these types of programs in their respective districts. “It's comforting to know my kids can do the advanced learning program at Asa Mercer Middle School. I want them to continue to be as challenged in school as they are in Rainier Scholars.”

After four months of independent school research, applications and visits, Rocio is satisfied having gone through the process. She shared, “Overall, I feel better informed and more confident. No matter what happens, it was a wonderful experience to visit the schools and see the type of curriculum these schools have to offer. That in itself was a great opportunity for me.”

A newsletter
from Rainier
Scholars

Spring 2018



Exploration and Transformation in the Middle School Years

Learning to Grow

By Tom Moore

Once students finish the intensive Academic Enrichment Phase (AEP), they are honored by a Rites of Passage ceremony and become Rainier Scholars. Completing the AEP is one of the most daunting experiences these youngsters will ever go through, and as mentioned in the last newsletter story on transformational experiences at Rainier Scholars, this is when they realize they too can be “college bound.” They feel the trajectory of their lives change. Everything is possible. And then, just a few short weeks later, there is an educational diaspora. Their cohort breaks apart, and the band of brothers and sisters disperse to some 47 different public and private schools around the Puget Sound.

This is the beginning of the middle school years – 6th, 7th and 8th grades. More often a state of mind than a descriptor of a stage of school, it is a time of moving away from one educational world towards another. At Rainier Scholars, the Academic Counseling and Support Services (ACSS) phase exists to help these students move through this “middle ground” as smoothly as possible. But more than that, it serves to open students up to opportunities that can spark new interests and associations that can carry through into high school.

“The combination of a deep personal grounding with the high-flying exposure to fun and exciting activities can be life-changing,



As ACSS Director Kaila Davis Nsimbi explains, “We try and help students build and maintain the relationships built within their cohort in the Academic Enrichment Phase and then take that sense of identity and connection within the group and move it forward into community and relationship building.”

The beauty of ACSS comes from its pairing of fun and challenging group activities geared to strengthen the close cohort connections,

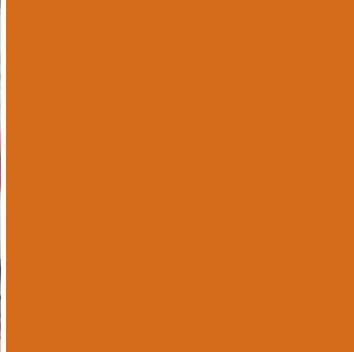
with a series of intense social-emotional and leadership workshops based on the ancient Greek concepts of Ethos and Virtus. Whereas much of the spirit of the 14-month-long AEP is around the English poet William Ernest Henley’s poem *Invictus* and its famous last lines, I am the master of my fate / I am the captain of my soul, ACSS serves to take the self-reflections and academic skills to the next level, moving scholars out of their safe harbors into the uncharted territory of middle schools where, hopefully, discoveries and new communities await.

The goal, as Ms. Davis Nsimbi explains, is to have scholars explore what it means to know “what their roots are, how they identify, what are the unchanging things and what are the things that they want to try out. How do they want to grow?”

In the workshops, students learn about Ethos – about one’s personal character and how it guides one’s beliefs and ideals; and about Virtus – finding the strength through courage to explore, to take risks and seek out new opportunities. They learn the influential power of peer groups on academic achievement in both a positive and negative way, as well as how to form the right mindset to take ownership of their own education. Scholars are constantly challenged to understand the risks involved in trying new things – the inherent racism, implicit bias, micro-aggressions they will face – and the rewards to be found from persevering through them.

The combination of such a deep personal grounding with the high-flying exposure to fun and exciting activities can be life-changing. Transformations in a scholar’s behavior can be expressed in simple and satisfying ways, like doing a double flip on a trampoline for the first time during a Saturday group event. Or more significantly, it can be an eye-opening discovery on a field trip in a subject the student never would have imagined before. It could happen by being introduced to Naturopathic Medicine at Bastyr University in Kenmore, getting excited about Marine Biology on a Salish Seas Expedition in the Puget Sound or experiencing the self-confidence nurtured during a four-week summer school program at Phillips Exeter Academy, one of the premier private high schools in America.

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Or, take the case of Raven Beavers, an 8th grader at Seattle Academy. Raven attended Amazon’s “A to Z Experience,” a one-day visit designed to inspire youth to pursue an education and perhaps a career in Science, Technology, Engineering, or Math (STEM) fields. Here she was introduced to Human Factors Engineers and heard them explain who they study and how they leverage physical and psychological characteristics to design devices and systems for human use. The tour opened Raven’s eyes to a new world, and she now wants to study computer programming and psychology when she gets to college.

There is no magic happening here. Like so many other scholars, Raven is bright and works hard. The key difference is the opportunity to explore and take risks in a safe and supported environment. As Ms. Davis Nsimbi reminds us, “When a student feels alone in something, it’s very hard for them to feel strong.” For middle school students to know they have the love and respect of their cohort and community as they venture out to explore new places, people and ideas, it critically impacts their educational success. It is also transformational for a child approaching new frontiers as a young adult.

Executive Director’s Perspective

“The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.” – Lao Tzu

Lao Tzu’s centuries old wisdom serves as a grounding philosophy in our work at Rainier Scholars. We meet our students at age 10 (some now even age 9 with our one-year earlier start initiative) when they take their first step, that of making the commitment to participate in the 14-month Academic Enrichment phase (AEP). That step, requiring fortitude and perseverance beyond what is imaginable for most peers their age, leads to the next one of pursuing authentic choice in where they attend middle school. From there, they move through our middle and high school years, taking steps and being challenged at each juncture to transform into the people they intend to become. Read closely in this issue and you will learn of these various points along the journey in which one step leads to another to another...all in the process of “charting the course to college and beyond.”

The greatest thrill in this work continues to be the evidence that our model works, which often comes in the form of updates from those alums who have now moved into the “beyond college” phase of life. In the past two weeks alone, I have corresponded with an alumna accepted into 10 of 11 graduate doctoral programs, and another who has her choice of top MBA business schools around the United States.



Three others are graduating from medical school this spring and have successfully matched for residencies across the country. Another alum is completing her 5th year of teaching and pondering what the next stage in educational leadership looks like for her, while

another is making his real-life, bona-fide living as an artist. As vast and diverse as their areas of interest are, one thread unites them all: their determination to use their chosen careers as a pathway to lead, serve and give back to the communities which have supported them

over the years. More than anything else, this is the metric for success which matters most to all of us involved on a daily basis at Rainier Scholars. For through our scholars’

success, the impact and effect becomes exponential on the communities in which they live.

I look forward to seeing many of you at our luncheon in April, where stories of the long journey and transformation will be shared. And where we can once again come together to honor and support all those scholars who had the courage to take the first step to college and beyond!

Sarah Smith

Sarah Smith, Executive Director

The greatest thrill in this work continues to be the evidence that our model works...



College Applications

Holding the Vision

By Mary Bristow

From an early age, our scholars and families talk about their college dreams.

As educational pathways reveal academic preparation and opportunities, those dreams become a vision for what is possible. Our program services during the high school years focus on college planning – how to choose colleges, the financial aid process, test prep, creating your list of stretch and safety net schools and the importance of telling your story through a college essay.

“What was once a dream is now a vision for what is next to come.



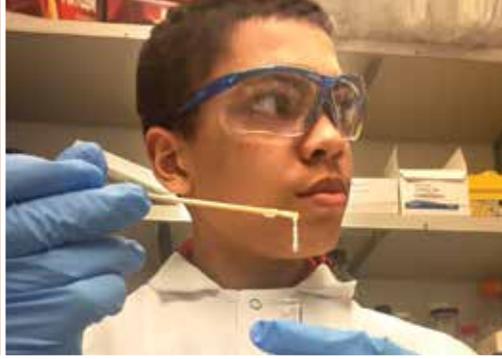
Then, suddenly it’s the summer before senior year and time for college application boot camp. This is where things get REAL. Roman Bactol, a senior at Seattle Academy, arrived at application boot camp with a few reservations. “I wasn’t really enthusiastic about filling out applications for college. I didn’t know how to do it, but this session gave me the push that I needed. When I finished, it put me a couple months ahead of my peers. That felt good.”

For Roman, the most impactful part of the process was the opportunity to meet college representatives and admissions officers during fall

workshops at Rainier Scholars. In a relaxed setting, scholars were able to share their hopes and concerns, along with anxieties and excitement about the college search process. “I was able to ask anything on my mind about colleges, whether it was financial aid questions, or essay prompts, to dorm life. The admissions officers wanted to help me in any way they could, and they always had an answer for my questions.”

Receiving guidance and wisdom strengthens the vision. For our scholars, it is a journey into uncharted territory. Roman and his peers in Cohort 10 are now receiving college acceptances, contemplating their choices and starting the decision making process. What was once a dream is now a vision for what is next to come.





College Graduations

From College to Careers

By Mary Bristow

Four years ago, this group of high school scholars in colorful sweatshirts were celebrating college acceptances, eager to take their first steps on to a college campus. From Allegheny to Emory, Dartmouth to Pomona, Macalester to Morehouse. From Boston University to SU, UW and WSU. These scholars have successfully navigated the path to college graduation.



In this photo you will find an aspiring lawyer, a future doctor and a mechanical engineer. You will see an emerging artist, a political activist and a future business entrepreneur. Careers in finance, computer science, environmental studies, engineering, marketing and education await.

Scholars are now charting their future. Congratulations to our 40 newest college graduates from the following schools:

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| Allegheny College | Macalester College |
| Boston University | Morehouse College |
| Colgate University | Pomona College |
| Connecticut College | Scripps College |
| Dartmouth College | Seattle University |
| Davidson College | Smith College |
| Eastern Washington University | Southern Methodist University |
| Emory University | St John's University |
| Evergreen College | University of Washington |
| George Washington University | Washington State University |
| Lafayette College | |

Rainier Scholars Alumni

New Board Member

Bisrat Gebre is a consultant at Bluewolf, an IBM Company which is the Salesforce Consulting arm of IBM's Global Business Services Group. He helps organizations implement and transform their business through Salesforce, and related cloud technologies.

Bisrat joined Bluewolf out of college as a Business Development Representative.

His interest in Salesforce and solving complex problems led him to move from the sales organization to the delivery group, eventually transitioning to a business analyst role. He now acts as a consultant helping lead engagements with key accounts.

Bisrat is a proud Rainier Scholars alum. As a member of Cohort 3, he attended Bishop Blanchet High School, graduated from Washington State University with a degree in Finance, and currently serves on the Rainier Scholars Alumni Council.

"I've seen the type of impact this program has in not only helping students achieve the dream of college graduation, but also in providing them with the skills to succeed in their lives and careers. I was blessed enough to have the opportunity to be a Scholar and would love to have a hand in ensuring more kids have that same opportunity."

Bisrat is currently living in the Columbia City neighborhood and is an avid fan of all Seattle area sports teams.





RAINIER SCHOLARS

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Welcome New Board Members

Bradaigh Wagner is a Managing Director at Endeavour Capital, a regionally-focused private equity firm, investing in and partnering with privately-held companies headquartered throughout the western United States. She currently sits on the boards of New Seasons Market, Arizona Nutritional Supplements, Pacific Market International, and OFD Foods. Bradaigh started her career as an investment banker in New York City.



“During a program tour several years ago, five young Scholars peppered me with questions and shared thoughts about their experiences in the program. I was so impressed with their directness, curiosity and enthusiasm. I knew then that Rainier Scholars was really unique – identifying bright students, with big dreams and emboldening them. Everyone deserves a fair shot, and I am proud to be supporting Rainier Scholars’ important work in providing that.”

Bradaigh received an AB from Princeton University and an MBA from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. She lives in Seattle, Washington with her husband and two young children.

Kristen Roby Dimlow is the Corporate Vice President of Microsoft Total Rewards, Performance and HR Business Intelligence. Kristen is a 20-year Microsoft veteran who spent the first half of her career in corporate finance before moving to HR. In addition to Microsoft, Kristen has worked at F5 Networks, Walt Disney and GE.



Kristen holds a BBA in Management from the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, VA, and serves on the board of Planned Parenthood of the Great Northwest and Hawaiian Islands.

“Rainier Scholars is an organization that gives me hope, and continues to prove that kids who are provided opportunity through high-quality education, go on to do amazing things that will change our planet for the better.”

Kristen and her husband Jim have two sons, Billy and Henry. She and Jim enjoy hiking, skiing, and travel in addition to attending their sons’ sporting events.