

For 2018-19, FODARA awarded four \$1000 scholarships, two at De Anza and two at Foothill. Below are the winning students' amazing and inspiring essays.

FOOTHILL COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

Matthew, Major Psychology

Compared to my time in high school, these last quarters at Foothill College have been my best moments; I received three 4.0's and one quarter of a 3.92 GPA, bringing my overall GPA from a 2.62 to 3.63. Last quarter I took 20 units, worked twenty-five hours per week, and was involved in student government, clubs, and other extracurricular activities—and I still completed my UC applications. I'm in a place I never thought I could reach, despite my circumstances. Before starting at Foothill, I struggled in high school, eventually dropping out. Though I received my GED in late 2015, I didn't pursue education thinking I might drop out again. Due to family problems, I spent over a year homeless, sleeping in my car and on friends' couches. When I did enroll in college, thanks to financial aid, scholarships, working twenty-five hours a week, and some good luck, I've been able to secure a room to call my own.

Now, I'm on track to graduate with two Associate Degrees, in psychology and communications. I'm planning to transfer to a UC in the fall. I've also been involved in political activism, working towards the goal of affordable housing in the Bay Area. I know many students who are in need of housing and have made it my goal to help them. Though progress feels slow at times, it is, without a doubt, one of the things I'm most passionate about. I've also begun to involve myself in the world of research in psychology, conducting research and data analysis in my own time and for class, and have submitted a proposal to present at the upcoming Western Psychological Association conference in April. The data I've collected through surveys will also be used to benefit support services on campus, such as EOPS, which has been an integral part of my college success. Despite the hardships and challenges I've dealt with in my life, I feel ready to pursue an education and even more ready to succeed.

Brook, Major Psychology

"Brandon," the nurse called out. I cringed. It had been four months since anyone called me by that name and it felt foreign, almost painful. I was beyond nervous. My simple breakfast of oatmeal and black coffee betrayed me, turning somersaults inside my knotted stomach as I walked down the hallway towards the exam rooms. But, here I was-- my day of reckoning. It was the day I began my gender transition from male to female.

It was difficult for me to find quality care in my rural community, even in the crux of the modern-day transgender rights movement, even in California, even in 2016. Early on, it became clear that my own challenges navigating the medical and mental health care system pale in comparison to some of the stories and

experiences I have heard while working within my community. This world of experiences is where my passion for psychology was born. As a resource coordinator for an LGBT Center, I recall countless stories of folks who were battling addiction, poverty, discrimination, depression, and homelessness. I was hearing many of my own experiences reflected back to me. It was then that a fire towards social justice was lit inside of me, and, for the first time in my 36 years of life, I finally felt like I had found my purpose: one day to be an educator, a researcher, and a clinician who aims at understanding and improving mental health outcomes within my community.

Next month, I celebrate 10 years of continuous sobriety. Pulling myself out of homelessness and addiction is without a doubt one of my most significant accomplishments. But it certainly isn't an obstacle I overcame alone. I have positively been affected by the role of mental health providers at a time when I needed them, so it has always been my goal to bring my experience full circle. This is the driving force behind choosing psychology as my field of study.

When I look at my academic record, I don't see perfection. What I do see, however, is someone who has worked hard to excel in lower division courses, pursuing the field that she has found a passion for. I see someone with a clear path and an internal drive to succeed. I see someone who I am proud to know -- me. When I step onto a four-year college campus next fall, I won't be right out of high school, uncertain what to do with myself, like I would have been 20 years ago. I will be joining the student body as a strong and confident 39-year old woman who knows exactly who she is and where she wants her educational career to lead. I am driven, and I bring with me the passion and resilience to not give up until I achieve my goals. I will admit there was a time where I viewed my non-traditional status as a liability, and sometimes self-doubt still creeps up in the back of my mind: "You're almost forty and trying to get a degree. You think you can make a difference?" But, I haven't let that voice stop me because I know that we all have different paths to get to where we are going, and I know my purpose is to be part of a positive change.

I'm an excellent candidate for a scholarship because I am prepared and focused. I've continued to improve in my life not just academically, but also personally. I am a dedicated, well-rounded

DE ANZA COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

Lin, Major Accounting

Achieving one's dream is never easy. I come from a low-income family in China. Because my father was laid off and my mother has a disability, I could not afford college tuition. But attaining a higher education has always been my dream. Now that I have immigrated to the U.S., I have an opportunity to chase my dream. My

parents are proud of me because I will be the first and only person in our family to attain a higher education.

At first in the U.S., it was difficult to fully understand what people were saying, so I only had an idea of how to respond in Chinese. I knew if I couldn't overcome the language obstacle, I could not survive. So, during my first two quarters at De Anza, I enrolled in three English classes for non-native speakers. I attended my professor's office hours to discuss materials I didn't understand in class, and I signed up for tutoring. I took every chance I could to speak and write in English. Learning and practicing a little every time, added together, turned into major progress within those first two quarters. Now an acclimated English speaker and De Anza college student, I see how I can realize my dream of being an accountant with a CPA credential. I plan to transfer to the University of Texas-Austin to attain a bachelor's degree in accounting. I will finish all transfer-required classes at De Anza by Spring 2019. In preparation for this career, I will participate as an IRS volunteer, helping to file tax returns for low-income families. I will practice my knowledge and skills and contribute to my community. In addition, I am applying for a summer internship in public accounting firms, which will provide me with hands-on experience in a corporate accounting setting.

With the financial support from this scholarship, I will be able to focus on the classes I take and put more effort into learning, which will help me to finish the coursework successfully, establishing a solid foundation of accounting knowledge for my future career. My dream of attaining a higher education is not easy to attain, but giving up is not an option. Once I achieve my career goals, I will pay forward this opportunity to other immigrants to the U.S. who have similar struggles as I had.

Roya, Major Computer Science

I was fourteen when my family moved to the U.S. from Iran. Not only did we struggle financially but also emotionally after my father abandoned us. I felt desolate, dejected, and depressed. The silent streets and private homes of San Jose felt daunting; they were far from what I was accustomed to in my hometown of Mashhad: neighborly conversation, bustling nightlife, and constant interactions with friends. This newfound isolation from the sights, sounds, and smells of Iran made it difficult to call my new country, home.

I experienced the same despondency in my new high school. I was confused and insecure in English class. The world I once knew—of Farsi poetry, stories, and conversation—no longer existed. Add to that a language barrier. Upon arrival, I couldn't speak a word of English. However, my English teacher, Ms. Mendoza, provided a nurturing environment, and began to break out of my shell. Her words provided not only inspiration, but also comfort and wisdom. I spoke up more. I

was doing better in all my classes and finally made new friends. For once, I felt like I belonged.

My struggles of immigration have made me more resilient and open to challenges. I now speak and write in English with abandon, and when I make mistakes, I never give up. I dig to the crux of my problems and learn how to avoid future errors. I haven't always made the best decisions, but I can say that I am growing from each and every experience.

I took a self-assessment class at De Anza College to guide me in the right direction. I constantly reminded myself that as a child, I loved solving puzzles and logic problems, and while my peers attempted to deter me from pursuing a career in a quantitative field, this class confirmed my initial passions. I enrolled in a programming class and loved it. I became a teaching assistant for my introductory programming class. While computer science is a predominantly male-dominated field, I didn't let it intimidate me. I took on the challenge and my love for computer science grew. After taking a few introductory courses, I helped establish a computer science club for women and advocated for academic support to better serve underrepresented communities in computer science. I felt empowered, as a woman of color in STEM, to not only help those who were struggling with courses, but also to inspire a passion for problem-solving in other students on campus.

Now, at the end of my community college career, I have taken six computer science courses, which have built up my skills to a significant degree. My role as both a teaching assistant and a representative of women in computer science has best prepared me for a future in some of the most rigorous computer science programs.