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Point Foundation grants scholarships to 30 LGBT students



Written by Point Foundation

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SAN FRANCISCO-The Point Foundation announced May 24 that it has granted scholarships to 30 outstanding gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students. The Point Foundation provides financial support, mentoring and hope to meritorious students who are marginalized because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. "Our newest Point Scholars represent the best and brightest in our community, coming from diverse educational fields, genders and gender identities, sexual orientations, racial backgrounds, economic circumstances and geography," said Bruce Lindstrom, Point Foundation Founder and Chair of the Board of Directors.

"Our scholars are chosen for their demonstrated leadership, scholastic achievement, involvement in the GBT community, and financial need. This year's group of scholars far exceeded our expectations."

As of June 2006, there will be 65 Point scholars currently in school and 12 alumni. While the average scholarship award is \$12,500, TPF supports scholars in other programmatic capacities. For example, the Point's mentoring program and scholar retreat create a multifaceted support network for scholars extending far beyond their time in school. The average amount of financial support devoted to each scholar exceeds \$33,000 which includes scholarship funding, mentoring and leadership training.

"We were thrilled with the high caliber of scholars who applied for funding this year," said Lindstrom. "The selection process was difficult but ultimately rewarding. We received well over 1,300 completed applications for scholarships this year and only wish we were able to provide for the needs of thousands of other disenfranchised LGBT scholars, many of whom struggle to afford college."

Several major foundations and corporations have partnered with Point to fund LGBT students, including the Matthew Shepard Foundation (MSF) and MTV. Ivan Bukta, a student at the City College of New York, was chosen as the mtvU Scholar. MSF will fund Ellen Adams, an incoming freshman at Princeton, Matt Oertli, a student at Harvard Medical School, and Jennifer Wohlner, a Studio Art major at the University of Southern California.

"The Foundation is extremely proud to support Ellen, Matt and Jennifer in their studies and honor my son Matthew's life in this way." said Judy Shepard, Executive Director of MSF. "It is clear to me that these three leaders will go on to make the world a better place for all of us."

In addition to financial support, The Point Foundation matches scholars with mentors who are highly successful professionals in fields ranging from the arts and sciences, education and other humanities, to business, law and medicine. One of the central features of the Mentoring Program is an emphasis on community service. Each year, scholars are expected to develop and conduct a project that will directly impact the LGBT and straight allied community of interest to the scholar. Mentors advise scholars on the creation of these projects as well as ensure follow through that maximizes the benefit of the project to scholar's surrounding community. Project locations include Cape Town, South Africa; South Bend, Indiana; Madrid, Spain; Los Angeles; and Durham, North Carolina.

The 2006 Point Scholars are:

Ellen Adams: After graduating cum laude from high school and enrolling in the

Hispanic Studies Program in University of Granada in Spain, Ellen lost her family's support when she came out as bisexual. Now an undergraduate at Princeton University, Ellen plans to study public policy, literature and creative writing, with a future committed to social justice. She is a recipient of a Matthew Shepard Point Scholarship.

Ceceilia Allwein: When Ceceilia came out as a lesbian at seventeen, the church she attended in Fort Wayne, Indiana, threatened to publicly expel her. Her family followed the church's lead, throwing her out of her home. In order to overcome these hardships, she turned to music to express her pain and found the impetus to work for change in her community. She currently studies Vocal Performance at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, Massachusetts.

Katie Batza: At thirteen years old, Katie became the first out student in the history of her conservative Catholic high school in Atlanta, Georgia. Enduring taunts and threats, occasional violence, property damage, and incredible loneliness helped start the first queer youth organization in Atlanta, YouthPride. Katie is a doctoral student in History at the University of Illinois at Chicago, working on her dissertation entitled "Before AIDS: Gay and Lesbian Community Health in the 1970s." She is the recipient of a Wal-Mart Point Scholarship.

Lauren Beach: Hailing from Lansing, Michigan, Lauren came out as bisexual during her sophomore year of college. While working three jobs to fund her education, Lauren found time for activism and advocacy work at Michigan State University in East Lansing. Majoring in both Microbiology & Molecular Genetics and Social Relations, Lauren aspires to be a science-educated attorney involved in crafting socially conscious public policy decisions for global pharmaceutical approval standards.

Rick Betita: Even in an area as accepting as the San Francisco Bay Area, Rick still experienced anti-gay epithets and harassment at his high school when he came out at 15. Upon joining his high school's Gay-Straight Alliance, Rick was thrown into a world of activism when a group of parents chartered a petition to stop the club's activities on campus. Rick helped to successfully defend his GSA. He currently studies Engineering at Columbia University in New York City.

Brittany Bjurstrom: As a founder of her school's first-ever Gay-Straight Alliance in a suburb of Milwaukee, WI, Brittany worked to forge a safe environment for students of all sexual orientations and gender identities, while facing vandalism and harassment from multiple fronts of her community. She will enter Wellesley College, in Boston, Massachusetts, this fall.

Ivan Bukta: Ivan was born in Novi Sad, Serbia. While growing up through wars, poverty and upheavals in his country, he struggled to succeed in an extremely patriarchal and restrictive society. Ivan moved to New York in 2003 to study film. He has written, produced, shot, edited and directed five short films to date. Ivan is the recipient of the MTVu Point Scholarship.

Sarah Carlson: Sarah was raised in Livermore, CA. She had to attend a private school because her local high school was not a safe place for out gay students, which proved to be financially taxing to her supportive family. Sarah was active in her school's GSA and helped to foster a more open and tolerant environment. Sarah will be an incoming freshman studying History at UC Berkeley.

Ron Correa: Raised in Waldorf, Maryland, Ron graduated from high school summa cum laude, captain of the football and swimming teams, and JROTC Battalion Commander. Despite all of these accomplishments, he still received disrespect and discrimination from his peers when he came out at the end of high school. After leaving the US Air Force, Ron moved out on his own to fund his own college career. He is currently pursuing a BFA in photography and graphic design at Frostburg State University in Maryland.

Tyler Dillard: Tyler is from a small, conservative town in lower Alabama. The Christian high school he attended taught that homosexuals were perverts and abominations. Despite anti-gay harassment and discrimination after coming out at conservative Samford University, Tyler succeeded in being elected president of his class and to lead several other organizations. This fall, Tyler will study Political Science and Music at Rice University in Houston, Texas. He is a recipient of the Evelyn W. Harrison Point Scholarship.

Zach Dunlap: Zach was born in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Without a strong relationship with his parents, Zach raised himself and his sister. A member of his high school's Gay-Straight Alliance, Zach was elected to GLSEN's National Advisory Council. He will study Political Science at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colorado.

Johnanna Ganz: Johnanna is from a small, quiet town in Northern Wisconsin. Johnanna came out during her senior year, and encountered intolerance at home and at school. Kicked out of her house at 18, Johnanna managed to find her way to college, where she has continued to thrive. She studies Art History and Women's Studies at Hamline University in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Harjant Gill: Harjant was born in India, moved to the United States at 15, and came out at 16. He uses filmmaking as a way to empower himself and cope with the alienation from his family and culture. Harjant is currently pursuing a doctoral degree in Anthropology at American University in Washington, DC. His upcoming film, *Milind Soman Made Me Gay* is a documentary exploring how gay South Asians in the diaspora negotiate sexual desire with their cultural identity. Harjant is a recipient of the Carlos Enrique Cisneros Point Scholarship.

Ben Harvey: Ben grew up in rural Virginia, raised in a community where homophobia was the norm rather than the exception. Ben's career focus is health policy aimed at ending socioeconomic-based disparities in accessing medical care. After a year of Medical School at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Ben will begin at Harvard Law this fall, with an ultimate goal of completing both Law and Medical School.

Danny Kirchoff: Raised in Southern Maine by his grandmother, Danny faced homophobia, transphobia and classism from social workers and school administrators upon her death. Despite a lack of familial support, he became the first person in his family to attend college. Danny has worked with the Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League (SMYAL), the National Youth Advocacy Coalition (NYAC), Equality California, and the Transgender Law Center. This fall, he will enter law school at the City University of New York. Danny is a recipient of the Joanne Herman Point Scholarship.

Marcel LaFlamme: Marcel grew up in a small town in Massachusetts. He defended state funding for Gay-Straight Alliances while in high school and was involved in numerous activist projects while an undergraduate at Harvard. Marcel is committed to the idea of libraries as safe spaces and as nodes for progressive activism in rural communities. He will pursue his vision of "radical librarianship" at Simmons College Graduate School of Library and Information Science in Boston, Massachusetts.

Celia La Luz: Celia was born and raised in San Francisco. Her family struggled with poverty and she suffered relentless teasing and harassment from her peers. After joining LYRIC, a queer youth center, Celia began her work at outLoud Radio, where she produces radio essays that discuss what it means to be young and queer in the Bay Area. With her work exhibited on the air nationwide, she hopes to give voice to others silenced by oppression. Celia will attend Reed College in Portland, Oregon and continue her work with radio. She is the recipient of the Vance Lancaster Point Scholarship.

Rebecca Lawrence: Born and raised in Seattle, Rebecca is dedicated to the transgender community. Identifying as queer and androsexual, she is currently working on a long-term photography project portraying the lives and bodies of transpeople of color. This summer, Rebecca will make a film about hijra (third-

gender) life in India. She attends Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She is a recipient of a Wal-Mart Point Scholarship.

Anna McCrerey: Committed to social justice grassroots activism, Anna devoted the bulk of her University of Virginia undergraduate experience fighting for gender equality and queer rights, as well as engaging in HIV/AIDS research. After graduation, she traveled halfway around the world to put her AIDS theory and policy into practice as a Community Health--HIV/AIDS Peace Corps volunteer in the Kingdom of Swaziland. Anna will pursue a Masters of Public Health degree at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland.

Scott McKee: Scott came out to his parents during his sophomore year in high school in Houston Texas, which created an adverse environment at home. Despite this, Scott worked with other students to petition administrators at the school and district levels for the formation of a GSA, which was created the last month of his senior year. Scott studies Chemical Engineering at the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta, where he has been highly involved in LGBT activism on campus.

Derek Mize: As a first-generation college student and the only child of a single mother, Derek worked two jobs to support himself while earning a BA in English Literature, an MA in women's studies, and studying at the Sexuality Institute at the Universiteit van Amsterdam. Derek identifies his relationship with his single mother and his upbringing in Mississippi as the primary motivating factors towards his development of a political ethic centered on feminism, anti-racism, and LGBT equality. Derek will be a first year law student at University of Cincinnati School of Law. He is a recipient of a Wal-Mart Point Scholarship.

Nick Nanna Hadikwa Mwaluko: Nick was born in Tanzania, in east Africa but grew up in neighboring Kenya. After high school, Nick worked in the Nairobi bureau of the Reuters News Agency. During his undergraduate years at Columbia University, Nick transitioned from female to male while maintaining excellent grades. Nick will pursue an MFA in Playwriting at Columbia University.

Matt Oertli: Matt was born and raised in an evangelical Catholic household in San Antonio, Texas. Matt's church and parents negative attitudes toward homosexuality instilled in him a sense of self-loathing which resulted in ongoing depression and bouts with bulimia. Matt bounced back and excelled at Rice University, both in his studies and with his work at Bering Omega AIDS Hospice where he provided medical assistance and counseling to patients in their final weeks of life. Matt is currently a student at Harvard Medical School in Boston, Massachusetts. He is a recipient of a Matthew Shepard Point Scholarship.

Sarah Rohwer: Sarah was born and raised in the Hudson Valley community of Highland, New York. Sarah and other students at her high school fought for two years to win official recognition of their Gay-Straight Alliance. The GSA is now very active in her high school, with Sarah serving as vice-president. Sarah will study Genetics at Binghamton University in New York this fall.

LeLaina Romero: LeLaina was born in Queens, New York, and grew up in Orlando, Florida. A Ph.D. student in Counseling Psychology at Teachers College at Columbia University, her work has focused on the relationship between individual and societal well-being, beginning with a child abuse prevention project in Orlando.

Ben Singer: Ben grew up in a small town in northern Illinois, becoming the first in his family to obtain a college degree. As a transman in the early 1990s, when societal understanding of transgender issues was still very limited, Ben experienced estrangement from his family, physical abuse in a medical setting, and extreme isolation in general. His academic and activist work has paved the road for other trans activists and theorists. Ben is a Ph.D candidate in English at Rutgers University in New Jersey, completing an ethnography on the medicalization of trans people in public health settings.

Mykal Slack: Mykal was not brought up in the church, but nonetheless felt the homophobic sting of right wing religious rhetoric early on in small town Georgia. After obtaining a B.A. in Economics, a law degree, and working as an attorney, Mykal entered Divinity School at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. Now, as a third-year Master of Divinity student, his primary focus is on pastoral ministry and theology, as well as liturgical studies and vocal/gospel music.

Rachel Twardowski: Born and raised in the suburbs of Buffalo, New York Rachel first faced discrimination because she was Jewish. When she came out as a lesbian, her parents forbade her from spending time with her gay friends. Despite the friction, Rachel facilitates seminars about bullying, hate and hate crimes in her school and community. She will attend the University of Rochester to study Biomedical Engineering.

Jacob Weldon: Jacob grew up in Port Neches, TX, a the conservative Bible Belt town in the heart of southeast Texas. After coming out, Jacob experienced a world of backlash from family and friends that led him down a self-destructive road, concluding with a suicide attempt. Finding strength in his Christian faith, Jacob found the strength to accept himself. Jacob will attend Columbia University to pursue an individualized program in Human Rights Advocacy and Law.

Jennifer Wohlner: Jennifer grew up in Arlington Heights, IL, a suburb of Chicago. Jennifer helped shine light on homophobia in schools by bringing issues about LGBT and non-gender conforming youth to the forefront. Openly lesbian, Jennifer and a gay male classmate were elected Homecoming Queen and King, an event that received national media attention. Jennifer will attend University of Southern California to study Studio Art. She is a recipient of a Matthew Shepard Point Scholarship.

The Point Foundation is a publicly supported, 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Prospective donors and scholar applicants can learn more about these scholars and The Point Foundation at www.thepointfoundation.org.

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