

Admission Possible seniors set the pace in scholarships

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When Cooper High School senior Samuel Ogunyemi opened his mailbox last week, what he found was a free ride to college. Ogunyemi, who has been participating in Admission Possible's free after school college prep program for the past two years, is one of 20 Minnesota high school seniors to receive the Gates Millennium Scholarship. The award, supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, covers all expenses for an undergraduate degree at the college or university of the recipients' choice, and even the cost of a doctorate degree in some fields of study.

When he opened the letter, Ogunyemi was overwhelmed. "It said, 'Congratulations, Samuel,'" he recalls. "I said 'wow' for at least 30 minutes. Just 'wow' over and over. I showed my mom, and she was jumping up and down. It felt good."

Originally from Nigeria, Ogunyemi moved to Minnesota when he was 10. "My parents wanted me and my brother and sister to get an education in the United States," he said. "They said if you get a degree here, you can go anywhere in the whole world."

When he arrived, Ogunyemi's elementary school classmates had a hard time understanding his English, so he decided not to talk at school for three months and to just listen. He avidly watched children's programming like "Arthur" and "Teletubbies" and practiced English on his own. At the end of the school year, he spoke again. "I made three friends the last month of school," Ogunyemi said. "I learned by just listening."

In high school, Ogunyemi's friends encouraged him to join Admission Possible with them. "I'm glad I joined Admission Possible because it pushed me to apply for more scholarships and taught me more about college," Ogunyemi said. In Admission Possible after school sessions, he worked on applying for the Gates Scholarship, setting goals to complete sections of the 22-page application one at a time, including each of the eight essay questions.

Ogunyemi plans to attend North Dakota State University this fall and major in mechanical or electrical engineering or both. He wants to be a robotics engineer and plans to take advantage of the Gates Scholarship to go on to graduate school. "I'm just counting the days until college."

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I'm pretty excited."

This year, Admission Possible students make up half of Minnesota's Gates Millennium Scholarship winners, bringing the total number of Admission Possible Students who have won the award since its beginning to 28.

Each one of the more than 600 current Admission Possible seniors has worked diligently to complete scholarship applications. The students have been awarded more than 100 scholarships to date, including the nationally recognized Horatio Alger Scholarship.

"Paying for college can be an overwhelming obstacle for high school seniors, and especially for low-income students," said Jim McCorkell, Admission Possible CEO and founder. "Scholarships are one more step toward making college possible for our students. For our students to win such prestigious awards is an honor not only for them but also for Admission Possible."

Last year's Admission Possible seniors won more than \$2.9 million in scholarships, an average of more than \$4,650 per student. The approximate average unmet need for low-income students is \$4,000, as reported by the college access newsletter Postsecondary Education Opportunity, so for many Admission Possible students, scholarships help them overcome the financial obstacle college presents.

Helping students secure financial aid is a core piece of Admission Possible's mission. The AmeriCorps coaches who work with seniors in the program help students complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) process and identify private scholarships to which they can apply. The Admission Possible after-school curriculum for seniors includes lessons on how to compare financial aid packages offered from different institutions and the differences in forms of financial aid ranging from loans to grants.

In addition to national scholarships, Admission Possible students apply to many state and local opportunities. Thirty-one of the 42 Horatio Alger scholarships awarded in Minnesota - made possible by the Carl & Eloise Pohlad Family Foundation - went to Admission Possible seniors.