



How Often  
Do You Get  
to Change  
Someone's  
World?

SCHOLARSHIPS AT VASSAR COLLEGE





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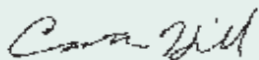
# Change someone's world.

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Each of the eight students profiled here would have a very different story were it not for donors – people like you – whose generosity ensured the scholarship support that made their Vassar experiences possible. Instead of stories that reflect the unique possibilities Vassar affords such promising young people, you would be reading accounts of opportunities lost, dreams deferred, and access denied.


And these students are simply representatives of a far larger number of individuals whose lives have been changed because financial aid opened the doors to Vassar for them. They also represent students who have not yet set foot on campus – the students of the future – whose inspiring stories, yet unwritten, depend on support from donors such as you.

That is why scholarships and financial aid are a top priority – indeed, perhaps *the* top priority – of the *Vassar 150: World Changing* campaign. As the nation's college-age population grows ever more socioeconomically diverse, Vassar needs your support now more than ever, to help change the worlds of students such as these ... so that they, in turn, can go out and change the world for the better, as Vassar graduates have been doing for 150 years.



Catharine Hill  
President

**“My professors really work at getting the students engaged, not only with the readings, but also class discussions. When I talk to my friends at other schools, that’s what seems to be missing from their educations.”**



**Y**ou might think that growing up in Lincoln, Nebraska, would mean that Vassar would be off the radar when the time comes to choose a college. But that certainly wasn’t the case for Will Lefferts; his mother was president of the Vassar Nebraska Club, and his sister was already at the College. “Vassar was one of my top three choices,” he says, “and when I visited, I loved it. So it proved to be not as much an adjustment for me as for some others, being a freshman with a senior sister.”

Since then, Lefferts has been pursuing a variety of interests at the College. The one that “really came out of the blue” was his major, Anthropology. When he took Cultural Anthropology his freshman year, he says he realized that “anthropology could be anything I wanted it to be.” After that, he wanted field experience. A summer in Florida studying the social aspects of hurricanes and other disasters followed, and then an archaeological dig at the Mohonk Preserve near the campus with Professor Lucy Johnson. “What’s really great about the classes I take at Vassar,” says Lefferts, “is that there are people from a lot of different majors – and that means they bring a lot of different perspectives to the classroom.”

He’s also been a student fellow in Jewett House, serves as Jewett’s representative to his class council, and organized an event for the Vassar Greens environmental justice group. More whimsically, Lefferts served as co-president of Air Cappella – an 11-member ensemble that takes Vassar’s rich history of a cappella groups in a new direction, since the members whistle, rather than sing, their songs. His next adventure will be in Paris, where he will spend a semester with the Vassar-Wesleyan program.

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**William Lefferts**

*Anthropology, French and  
Francophone Studies*






A photograph of Merema Ahmed, a young woman with dark hair, sitting on a bed in a room decorated with vibrant, patterned textiles. She is wearing a dark blue t-shirt and a colorful, patterned scarf. She is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. In front of her is a purple laptop, and several books are scattered on the bed. To her left, a colorful patterned dress hangs on a rack. The background features a large, circular, patterned tapestry and a wooden door. The overall atmosphere is warm and scholarly.

Merema Ahmed

*History, French and  
Francophone Studies*



**“I’m trying to find that voice within myself to articulate complexities of identity within the African Diaspora, in order for contemporary narratives to progress. My classes and experiences are helping me find that voice.”**

Just a few weeks into her senior year, Merema Ahmed is already waxing sentimental: “My friends and I, we’re trying to take in this year, to appreciate the time we have left together, because we know that next year we hope to be spread out in all corners of the world.” As the first participant in the College’s Ghana Fellowship Program, she’s already gotten a sense of how that will feel.

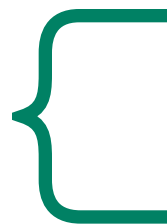
Hailing from Fargo, North Dakota, Ahmed spent the spring semester of her junior year in Ghana “engaging in field work that involved interviewing African-American expatriates about their conceptions of Diaspora consciousness/community and African identity.” She was first propelled to become a History major through a course in Black Intellectual History. “I think history is tremendously important in helping you understand the person that you are and have become,” she says. “By exploring this history, I’ve found a more clear, yet still incomplete, sense of who I am.”

In addition to completing her senior thesis, which “challenges historical conventions of Black leadership through three female case studies in the U.S.-Ghanaian transnational politics of the early to mid 1960s,” Ahmed continues to dance with Hype, a hip hop group she co-founded; serves as treasurer for the grassroots student political organization Democracy Matters; was on the Student Sesquicentennial Steering Committee; and is a mentor both to a Poughkeepsie High School student through the Exploring College program, and to elementary school-aged girls through Sistah Power, a collaborative effort of the Women’s Studies and Campus Life/ALANA programs.

“There’s so much that I’ve been fortunate to take part in because of Vassar,” she says. “I am eternally grateful and bound to Vassar, and to all of the people who are part of this institution and community for the help I’ve received throughout this ongoing journey.”



**“The alumni are so passionate about the school. They still love it so much, and I can relate to that as I develop my own sense of Vassar history on a personal level.”**



By his own account, Vincent Marchetta constantly likes to “try something different.” That’s why he wrote his first piece of music for the piano in the third grade; that’s why he started rowing six years ago; and that’s why, after attending an all-boys’ Catholic high school, the Huntington, Long Island native chose Vassar for college.

“I visited campus twice, and I thought it was gorgeous,” he recalls. “It seemed like the right fit, and it is. I get the opportunity to do so much here that I would not have if I was at another school.”

A Political Science major, Marchetta, who serves as junior class president, notes, “I have a life plan – going to law school, then working in entertainment law. But I find *every* experience I have is worth it.” One such experience is rowing, which he describes as “a big sport – you kind of get enveloped in it. I might want to coach after college.”

Then there’s music. He plays saxophone in the Wind Ensemble. And when it comes to his music composition, that’s another place where he thinks big: his favorite genre is “romantic soundtrack-type music.” But he credits Vassar with “pushing my limits on my own concept of what music can be,” and is trying out some electronic acoustic sounds as well. “There’s always kind of a song in my mind,” he says with a smile.





A full-body photograph of a man standing on a wooden dock. He is wearing a red long-sleeved athletic top with white stripes on the sleeves and black shorts. He has his arms crossed and is looking towards the camera. The background features a calm body of water, a forested hillside, and a small boat with people in the distance. A seagull is visible in the sky. A green text box is overlaid on the top left.

**Vincent Marchetta**

*Political Science, Music*




A young man with short dark hair and a slight smile stands in a garden. He is wearing a light blue, long-sleeved button-down shirt with a fine checkered pattern. He is positioned in front of a dark green wooden lattice archway. The background is filled with lush green trees and foliage, with sunlight filtering through the leaves. A dark green semi-transparent banner is in the top right corner.

**David McCarthy**

*Biology*





**“I’ve learned to step out of my comfort zone, both socially and academically. If my high school self saw me today, he would probably say, ‘Where’d that kid come from?’”**

**D**avid McCarthy, a pre-med student majoring in Biology, admits he “sort of had no idea” of the significance of his work when he first began assisting his professor with research on the solid phase synthesis of protease inhibitors. It began making more sense to him when a public policy course he was taking looked at how these drugs are being used to halt the progression of HIV into AIDS. Then, in a seminar on molecular biology, he learned about their relevance in the field of genetics. “I started to see these different applications in all of my classes,” he says. “All of a sudden I started to realize that what I’m working on is really meaningful.”

Growing up in Wayland, Massachusetts, McCarthy knew from a young age, and for a personal reason, that he would enter the field of medicine: “After seeing my Mom’s battle with cancer, I knew that I wanted to make a difference for people in similar situations.” Though other schools he applied to “fit the bill with well-known pre-med programs,” he feels he’s benefiting from the research environment at Vassar and the broad interests of his classmates. “Even within the Biology Department,” he observes, “you have students who are interested in marine biology, or environmental sciences, and they’re thinking about the human perspective or looking at plants. It’s a small community, but you have a lot of different perspectives.”

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**“Vassar has this way of making even your  
unlikeliest dreams come true.”**



Equality and social justice have been very important to Erin Donohoe ever since she was attending middle school in her hometown of Waynesboro in rural Pennsylvania. “In high school I went on an exchange to the town of Celaya in Mexico,” she recalls. “They made me feel so at home that I thought, ‘Why don’t we do that right here, in America?’”

A friend who applied early decision to Vassar told her, “You’ll love it!” so “I looked at the website and it was really cool. It was the last college I applied to.” Another turning point came for her when she took “Ethics of War and Peace,” a Political Science seminar with Stephen Rock.

Now Donohoe is looking at grad school and a career in immigration policy. She has served for two years as a mentor to students from Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico at Poughkeepsie High School near the Vassar campus.

When not studying, Donohoe has been exploring a variety of other activities – whether it’s rowing, “a really good experience that made me feel like I could do things I never thought possible,” or Nordic skiing. (“My second time on skis was a 15-kilometer race in Vermont. I came in last by half an hour, but it felt so good to finish and I got a big group hug.”) More recently, she’s been delighted to find herself singing jazz, and even playing drums, with the Roundabout Ramblers, a musical group primarily composed of Vassar faculty.

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**Erin Donohoe**

*International Studies,  
Hispanic Studies*






A portrait of Yen Nguyen, a man with dark hair and glasses, wearing a purple button-down shirt and jeans, standing with his arms crossed on a grassy lawn. Behind him is a building with a large glass wall on the left and a red brick wall with arched windows on the right. A green semi-transparent banner is in the top right corner.

**Yen Nguyen**

*Drama*





**“I’m always excited to run into new people.  
It’s too fun to pass up those first  
conversations and arguments.”**

“I didn’t expect Vassar to affect my personality as much as it actually has,” Yen Nguyen says with a laugh. “I enjoy going home for break – but then I find myself looking forward to being back at Vassar. I have to call someone just to ask, ‘Can we just talk about really big things, with really big words?’”

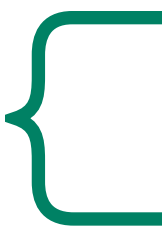
Nguyen was born near his current hometown of Bethesda, Maryland, after his parents and older siblings had emigrated to the U.S. from Saigon, Vietnam. Going into his junior year in high school, he thought that he would become a physics major – until he went to see his school’s production of *Singin’ in the Rain*, an experience he describes as “life-changing.”

When it came time to look at colleges, he recalls, “I distinctly remember going to Penn, Bard and Vassar. Vassar was the only one that really, really struck me as someplace you wanted to *be*. It was lived in. You could really enjoy the variety of everything, from the architecture to the people.”

He says he found freshman year a challenge because “In a new place, you go in knowing you’re not necessarily going to be the one who stands out.” Even so, he has vigorously pursued his newfound theatrical dreams at Vassar: “I love where I am right now compared to where I was three years ago. I’ve learned a great deal and I know I’ll miss this place when it comes time to go.”

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**“I honestly enjoyed being on the All-School Gift Committee. I found myself working with people who actually care about what the school will be like *after* we’re here. I didn’t know we had so many students who were dedicated to that.”**



**I** was really shy – like, *really* shy – in high school,” says Pam Vogel. But something happened to the native of the small upstate New York town of Yorkville once she made it to Vassar. Vogel has served as an officer of her class for three years, including two as president; she was also one of her class’s representatives on the committee that spearheaded the spectacularly successful effort to raise money for Vassar’s Annual Fund as an All-School Gift from the College’s students in honor of the Sesquicentennial. Once “terrified of public speaking,” Vogel now says she feels “a rush of adrenaline” whenever she has to address a crowd.

A few other things have changed for Vogel, too. She came to Vassar thinking she might major in Political Science – and then she took Introduction to Urban Studies. “I realized it allowed me to study whatever I want – education, Africana Studies,” she recalls. “It was more fluid, and there were less requirements. That felt so great.”

Her thesis proposal centers around developing a social studies curriculum for grades 4 through 7 – because “Vassar changed my entire mind about education.” The idea of teaching, which before had seemed maybe a little too typical and humdrum, suddenly became exciting. She credits Professor Erin McCloskey for altering her perceptions. “It’s been so eye-opening,” Vogel says. “I really appreciate how she cares. She’s really genuine, and never comes off being too busy to talk to you. You can tell she’s an Education Professor; she just gets it.”

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A woman with brown hair, wearing a blue top and black pants, is sitting on a red velvet sofa. The room has pink walls and a large arched window with a white frame. A potted plant is visible near the window. To the right, there is a small white table with a lamp and another red velvet chair. The floor is covered with a dark red patterned carpet.

Pamela Vogel


*Urban Studies*



A portrait of Wesley Thompson, a young Black man with a short haircut, wearing a blue V-neck t-shirt and jeans. He is sitting in a row of green theater seats, looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. His hands are clasped in his lap. The background shows several rows of empty green seats in a dimly lit theater.

**Wesley Thompson**

*Neuroscience and Behavior*



**“I had looked at another prestigious college, but the feeling there was definitely ‘Every man for himself.’ It’s the total opposite here.”**

Back in high school in Cypress, Texas, Wesley Thompson was going through the usual college search when he received a mailing from a college he had never considered – someplace in New York called Vassar. “My Mom got so excited,” he recalls. “She said, ‘You have to take a look at this one.’ So I checked out the website, and I liked what I saw.”

Even so, the Hudson Valley is a long way from the Houston area, so he never did visit the College before move-in day. “The campus was so beautiful my breath was taken away,” he remembers. “I loved the architectural styles of the buildings, and all the brickwork. The Library is magnificent. I got lost in there a good hour or so.”

Once ensconced at Vassar, Thompson, who had “always been interested in science, was always into biology, but I never took a psychology class,” read about the Neuroscience and Behavior program, which he calls “a fusion of biology and psychology.” He took his first psychology course, and since then he has “never looked back.” Says Thompson, “I like concrete principles I can adhere to, but I also like studying how personalities end up being so different.

“I always thought I was pretty open-minded,” he adds, “but Vassar has been more horizon-broadening than I expected, in and out of the classroom. I’ve loved the experiences here of meeting people who hold different opinions from mine.”

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