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## GSA Youth Leaders Win \$5,000 College Scholarships

Jun. 8, 2010 ? Carolyn

GSA Network offers our congratulations to the thirteen high school seniors who won an **eQuality Scholarship** this year! The high school students will each receive a \$5,000 college scholarship from the eQuality Scholarship Collaborative, which awards students in Northern and Central California who have promoted understanding of and equality for the LGBTQ community. Additionally, one nursing student will receive a \$5,000 scholarship and one medical student will receive a \$2,000 scholarship. GSA Network is a proud member of the eQuality Scholarship Collaborative.

Among the high school seniors, nearly every winner was the president or founder of their school's GSA club, a testament to the importance of GSA organizing in shaping LGBTQ activism among youth today.

The scholarships were given out at an awards dinner, the 21st Annual eQuality Scholarship Awards Event on Friday, June 4, 2010 in San Francisco. Every year, this special awards ceremony brings hope and inspiration to the recipients, their families, and the hundreds of supporters who attend the dinner. Each scholarship recipient is introduced by someone meaningful to them, who helps tell a bit about why the award winner is so deserving. The stories are incredibly moving. Some choose a family member, such as **Taylor McElroy** who was introduced by her amazingly supportive father, who shared how proud he was of his activist daughter after she got outed in middle school in a small town near Redding, CA. Another student who was not out to her parents wasn't able to share this honor with them, but received encouragement from the audience that someday she would feel ready to come out and her parents would be proud of her and her work as an LGBT youth radio journalist.

Other recipients choose a teacher or GSA advisor to introduce them, such as **Lauren Alexander** from Las Lomas High School, whose teacher compared her to Wonder Woman based on her heroic efforts to transform her school through peer education and GSA leadership. This year one student, **Parmita Choudhury**, was introduced by a local pastor in Clovis who praised her for being a straight ally leader in the GSA in such a conservative community. This was similar to the story of **Olivia Garrison**, who founded the GSA at Frontier High School in conservative Bakersfield, when no one thought it could be done, but she explained, "They hadn't met me yet."

Some have a friend or even their boyfriend or girlfriend introduce them, such as **Terra Cheney** from De Anza High School in Richmond, who inspired us all with her story of courage to do peer education at school after experiencing a physical attack earlier in high school, or **Erin LaJeunesse**, whose friend praised her for helping win a campaign to establish unisex bathrooms at Anzar High School in the Salinas Valley.

For every scholarship winner, the scholarship funds and the dinner itself serve as an affirmation of their dedication and perseverance throughout high school to stand up for what they believe in.

The dinner also featured a keynote address from **Michael Kyle**, a scholarship winner from 2001 who now leads the LGBT employee resource group at Wells Fargo and serves on the board of GSA Network.

This year also marked the 20th anniversary of the *Bobby Griffith Memorial scholarship award*, one of the named eQuality Scholarships. The Bobby Griffith Memorial scholarship is given to an LGBTQ or ally student from Contra Costa County each year. The initial scholarship was \$500, and it has grown to its current level of \$5,000 through the support of the Griffith family, whose experience of losing Bobby Griffith to suicide was the subject of an award-winning documentary "Prayers for Bobby," as well as a dedicated group of educators and PFLAG members in Contra Costa County. The 2010 Bobby Griffith Memorial Scholarship will be awarded to **Jason Yuen**, who is graduating from Monte Vista High School in Danville and will be attending UC Riverside.

Congratulations to all of the winners!

**Erin LaJeunesse**, *Anzar High School, San Juan Bautista*  
**Frank Nguyen Le**, *Alameda High School, Alameda*  
**Jason Yuen**, *Monte Vista High School, Danville*  
**Jesus Juarez**, *Woodlake High School, Woodlake*  
**Ken Savage**, *University High School, San Francisco*  
**Lauren Alexander**, *Las Lomas High School, Walnut Creek*  
**Mika Sasaki**, *Raoul Wallenberg High School, San Francisco*  
**Olivia Garrison**, *Frontier High School, Bakersfield*  
**Parmita Choudhury**, *Buchanan High School, Clovis*  
**Phuong Tseng**, *Abraham Lincoln High School, San Francisco*  
**Taylor McElroy**, *Anderson New Technology High School, Anderson*  
**Terra Cheney**, *De Anza High School, Richmond*

The students plan to study everything from math and pre-law to biology and political science. Stanford, Mills, Grinnell, McGill, and San Francisco State University are just a few of the universities that will welcome the students this fall.

*The eQuality Scholarship Collaborative is the joint effort of LGBTQ employee groups at PG&E, Kaiser Permanente, Genentech, and KPMG, and nonprofit organizations Out & Equal Workplace Advocates and Gay-Straight Alliance Network. To date, the Collaborative has given over \$450,000 to more than 190 youth.*

**To learn more (or apply next year!) visit:** [www.equalityscholarship.org](http://www.equalityscholarship.org) <sup>[1]</sup>.

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**Links**

[1] <http://www.equalityscholarship.org>