American Rhodes Scholars-Elect for 2020

(Subject to ratification by the Rhodes Trustees after acceptance by one of the colleges of Oxford University)

District 1
KRISTINE E. GUILLAUME
Massachusetts—Harvard University
LILY MOORE-EISSENBERG
Massachusetts—Yale University

District 2
WANJIKU GATHERU
Connecticut—University of Connecticut
LAURA PLATA
Connecticut—Yale University

District 3
SERENA ALAGAPPAN
New York—Princeton University
LUKE MELAS-KYRIAII
New York—Harvard University

District 4
STEPHEN DAMIANOS
Pennsylvania—University of Pennsylvania
OLIVIA McGINNIS
Pennsylvania—Harvard University

District 5
DAINE ALEXANDER VAN DE WALL
Maryland/DC—United States Military Academy
EILEEN ZIJIA YING
Maryland/DC—University of Virginia

District 6
ELLE DEICH
Georgia—Duke University
ANANYA AGUSTIN MALHOTRA
Georgia—Princeton University

District 7
ARIELLE HUDSON
Mississippi—University of Mississippi
SARENA MARTINEZ
Alabama—Vanderbilt University

District 8
LAUREN SPOHN
Texas—Harvard University
LIANA WANG
Texas—Yale University

District 9
PRATHM JUNEJA
Indiana—University of Notre Dame
KRITIKA SINGH
Virginia—Northeastern University

District 10
VILHELM L. ANDERSEN WOLTZ
Ohio—Massachusetts Institute of Technology
HENRY WU
Ohio—Ohio State University

District 11
ANNA ESENThER
Michigan—Michigan State University
CLAIRE HALLORAN
Wisconsin—Massachusetts Institute of Technology

District 12
HERA JAY BROWN
Tennessee—University of Tennessee, Knoxville
ROSSELLA GABRIELE
Missouri—Washington and Lee University

District 13
NEIL BENJAMIN BAND
Nebraska—Harvard University
JAKE REAGAN
Colorado—University of Colorado-Boulder

District 14
CHRISTINA PAO
Oregon—Yale University
CYRUS V. REZA
Alaska—Stanford University

District 15
CAMILA PELSINGER
California—Brown University
MEGAN A. YAMOAH
California—Massachusetts Institute of Technology

District 16
LEANNE HO
California—University of Oklahoma
FRANCISCA VASCONCELOS
California—Massachusetts Institute of Technology
From the AARS President:

The Association of American Rhodes Scholars (AARS) is pleased to present our traditional newsletter, The American Rhodes Scholar, introducing the newly elected Rhodes Scholars to the Rhodes community, to Oxford, and to well-wishers and educational institutions nationwide. It is indeed a joy to learn about these fine young people who will follow in our footsteps to Oxford next September.

In addition to introducing our 2020 Scholars, this newsletter reports on the 25th annual “Bon Voyage” Weekend, sponsored by AARS for the Class of 2019 Rhodes Scholars, which took place in New York City last September 27-29. This BVW gave the new Rhodes Scholars an opportunity to meet each other before traveling to Oxford and dispersing among its colleges. In addition, by interacting with a wide variety of alumni Scholars of all ages who took part in the Weekend, these young Scholars gained a new understanding of how Rhodes Scholars value scholarship, pursue public service, and participate in “the world’s fight.” The keynote speaker at the 2019 dinner was Elizabeth Kiss (Virginia and Balliol ’83), Warden and CEO of The Rhodes Trust.

This newsletter, as well as the American Oxonian and the Bon Voyage Weekend, are sponsored by AARS and are paid for by dues and generous annual contributions from its membership. On behalf of the Board of Directors, I thank you for continuing your vital support.

RALPH H. SMITH, President
(Alabama and Corpus Christi ’73)

About the Association of American Rhodes Scholars:

AARS was founded in 1907 and today has a membership of more than 2,200 Rhodes Scholars elected from or currently living in the USA. The mission of AARS is to bring Rhodes Scholars in America together in support of the Rhodes Scholarships, Oxford University, and the qualities of scholarship, leadership, and service that underlie the awards. The AARS publishes a highly acclaimed journal, The American Oxonian, promotes reunions and events, and administers charitable trusts supporting Oxford University and the distinguished Eastman Professorship at Oxford.
Serena Alagappan

Princeton University: AB, Comparative Literature, 2020
Proposed Oxford Course: MSc, Social Anthropology; MSt, World Literatures in English

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Career Aspirations
Academia and creative non-fiction writing

Serena Alagappan is a senior at Princeton University studying Comparative Literature, with language study in French, Latin, and American Sign Language. She is pursuing certificates in European Cultural Studies and Creative Writing. She was the editor in chief of the Nassau Weekly, and the president of the Princeton University American Sign Language Club until January 2020. She is a Behrman Society Fellow, and a recipient of the John McPhee ’53 Award for Summer Projects in Independent Journalism and a Peter B. Lewis Grant for an independent creative writing project on literary pilgrimage. She has interned at O, The Oprah Magazine and the Religion and Resettlement Project, where she interviewed and preserved stories of Holocaust survivors and Syrian refugees. Her writing has been published in Scientific American, O, the Oprah Magazine, Killing the Buddha, James Joyce Quarterly (forthcoming), The Nassau Literary Review, and the Nassau Weekly, among others. She hopes to continue finding personal and literary connections where one might expect to find differences.
Vilhelm L. Andersen Woltz

Massachusetts Institute of Technology: SB, Physics, 2020; SB, Electrical Engineering & Computer Science, 2020
Proposed Oxford Course: BA, Philosophy, Politics and Economics

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Career Aspirations
Scientist and public servant

Vilhelm (Billy) L. Andersen Woltz, from Logan, Ohio, is a senior at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology where he is pursuing double majors in Physics and in Electrical Engineering and Computer Science. Billy spent the first half of his time at MIT studying ecological systems biology in the Physics of Living Systems Group, where he investigated the role of environmental fluctuations in determining community structure. The summer before his junior year, Billy was in Switzerland applying methods from machine learning to improved performance of the Hadron Calorimeter, a sub-detector at CERN. He now focuses on the challenge of building larger quantum processors in MIT’s Engineering Quantum Systems group. He is an advocate for expanding access to science and technology education and founded a computer science camp for students at his former high school in rural southeastern Ohio. An Eagle Scout, Billy is also captain of the varsity cross-country team at MIT. He plans a career in science that will allow him to apply his technical knowledge in advising policymakers on science and technology issues.
Neil Benjamin Band

Harvard University: AB, Computer Science, 2020
Proposed Oxford Course: MSc by Research, Computer Science

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Career Aspirations
Professor of Computer Science and biotech entrepreneur

Neil Band is a senior pursuing a Computer Science degree with a minor in Economics. His senior thesis applies artificial intelligence to facilitate safer CRISPR genome editing. He has researched distributed machine learning optimization to improve seizure prediction for epilepsy patients, and security vulnerabilities in collateralized cryptocurrencies like Facebook’s Libra token. Neil is the co-founder of multiple social ventures, including the development of a cryptocurrency that aims to improve payment security in the world’s largest Syrian refugee camp. On campus, he has served as founding technology chair of the Harvard Undergraduate Blockchain Group and leads venture investment in student-founded startups with General Catalyst. In his free time, he enjoys dancing hip-hop and Bhangra, a traditional Indian dance style. At Oxford, Neil hopes to pursue an MSc by Research in Computer Science with focus in Bayesian machine learning and its application to drug discovery.
Hera Jay Brown

University of Tennessee, Knoxville: BA, Socio-Cultural Anthropology and Migration Studies, 2018

Proposed Oxford Course: MPhil, Development Studies; DPhil, International Development

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Career Aspirations
First openly transgender United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Hera Jay Brown is a 2019-2020 Fulbright-Schuman Student Research Fellow to Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Lithuania, and Malta, and will spend the academic year investigating the class-based distinctions of naturalization processes and bureaucracies across the European Union. Hera Jay’s Fulbright work centers on citizenship-by-investment schemes, the citizenship-by-performance nexus for refugees, and the ways that capital and social class engender different naturalization pathways and one’s role in the public commons. As the first openly Transgender Rhodes Scholar in the program’s 117-year history, Hera looks forward to advancing the representation of LGBTQ+ advocates and scholars in academia and policy. At Oxford, Hera aims to continue her research on innovative policy solutions for forced migration while also refining her passions for theatrical performance, advocacy, and sharpshooting.
Stephen Damianos

University of Pennsylvania: BA, Political Science, 2019

Proposed Oxford Course: DPhil, International Development

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Career Aspirations
Human rights lawyer

Stephen Damianos is currently pursuing an MPhil in Development Studies at the University of Cambridge. His research interrogates hierarchical vulnerability constructions within refugee populations, with a focus on gender, forced sex work, and labor mobility. Stephen graduated from the University of Pennsylvania with a perfect 4.0 GPA, having received the top departmental honor for political science, election to Phi Beta Kappa, and recognition as a Dean’s Scholar, the highest academic honor in the College of Arts and Sciences. While at Penn, Stephen founded Penn Undergraduates for Refugee Empowerment, the University’s first and now largest undergraduate organization dedicated to the advancement of forced migrants through academic mentorship, language assistance, and fundraising. Additionally, he founded an initiative to integrate local refugees into the University’s employment system, which he is still coordinating remotely. A Truman Scholar and an Emerging Scholar at the Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law, Stephen has worked with refugees in Pennsylvania, New York, and Athens, Greece, and strives to denaturalize crisis narratives of migration, working to support refugees in their efforts to procure safe and dignified livelihoods.
Elle Deich

Georgia

Duke University: BS, Biological and Artificial Intelligence, 2020
Proposed Oxford Course: MSc, Global Governance; DPhil, Computer Science

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Career Aspirations
Emerging technology governance through work at the intersection of research science and policy

Elle Deich is a senior Angier B. Duke Scholar at Duke University, where she successfully advocated for the creation of her own major in ‘Biological and Artificial Intelligence’. Prior to enrollment at Duke, she was self-taught. In the future, Elle hopes to work at the intersection of science and policy by contributing thoughtfully to the field of global catastrophic risk reduction. At Oxford, she plans to study global governance and diplomacy before pursuing further study in computer science and statistics.
Anna Esenther

Michigan State University: BA, Education; BS, Economics; BA, Statistics; BS, Psychology; BA, History, 2019

Proposed Oxford Course: MSc, Neuroscience

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Career Aspirations
Academic economist

Anna Esenther graduated from Michigan State University in 2019 with degrees in education, economics, statistics, psychology, and history. She is currently a first grade teacher at Inca Elementary in Buckeye, Arizona, and believes strongly in the importance of a high-quality public school system. While at Michigan State, she wrote two theses: one on the relationship between psychological empowerment and school administrator turnover, and another on the conflicting approaches of classical economists and Victorian novelists to understanding industrial capitalism. As a sophomore and junior, she completed four PhD-level courses in econometrics; she is interested in applying the tools of the field to the study of education and child well-being. Anna is also passionate about promoting diversity within economics and was the founder and president of Women and Minorities in Economics (WAMIE), an undergraduate organization at Michigan State. She was a competitive Irish dancer from middle school through college and enjoys hiking and tree climbing. At Oxford, she hopes to study the biology of learning and development through the MSc in Neuroscience before eventually pursuing a PhD in Economics.
Rossella Gabriele

Washington and Lee University: BS, Physics and Global Politics, 2019
Proposed Oxford Course: MSc, Global Governance and Diplomacy

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Career Aspirations
Space law

Rossella Gabriele graduated as a Johnson Scholar from Washington and Lee University with degrees in Physics and Global Politics. She has worked with the US Department of State, served as a policy intern for the US Senate Committee on Homeland Security, and was a nuclear astrophysics research intern at the Italian National Institute of Nuclear Physics. As Amnesty International’s president on campus, Rossella raised thousands for Rohingya refugees and women’s causes, and was awarded The Christopher Noland Student Activities Leadership Award. She also served as a resident adviser, a committee member on the First-Generation, Low-Income Partnership, and the Physics Chair of Women in STEM. She hopes to apply her skills in governance, science policy and social activism to the development of international space law.
Wanjiku Gatheru

University of Connecticut: BA, Environmental Studies, 2020
Proposed Oxford Course: MSc, Nature, Society and Environmental Governance; MSc, Environmental Change and Management

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Career Aspirations
Policy-maker and environmental justice scholar

Wanjiku “Wawa” N. Gatheru was born and raised in the northeast corner of Connecticut. The proud daughter of Kenyan immigrants, she is a senior at the University of Connecticut, majoring in Environmental Studies with minors in Global Studies and Urban and Community Studies. She is UConn’s first Rhodes Scholar. Throughout her college experience, Wawa has founded and led various environmental justice initiatives across her university and state. As the vice president of UConn’s undergraduate student body, she led the successful implementation of an environmental literacy general education requirement and co-led the state’s first youth climate lobby day. A Truman and Udall Scholar, Wawa led Connecticut’s first assessment of food insecurity at a public institution of higher education as the founder of the UConn Access to Food Effort (UCAFE). Her research helped inform the creation and passage of state policy on the issue. At Oxford, Wawa will continue her studies at the intersections of race, environment and policy. Her ultimate goal is to empower communities of color in the environmental decision-making process. She is an avid singer-songwriter and hopes to record an album in the near future.
Kristine E. Guillaume

Massachusetts

Harvard University: AB, History and Literature, 2020; AB, African American Studies, 2020

Proposed Oxford Course: MSt, English and American Studies

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Career Aspirations
Professor of English; Journalist

Kristine E. Guillaume is a senior at Harvard studying History and Literature and African and African American Studies. Kristine is the first black woman President of The Harvard Crimson, the independent daily, student-run newspaper. A recipient of the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship, Kristine’s undergraduate honors thesis examines memoir and autobiography in the era of mass incarceration. The daughter of immigrants, Kristine’s goals as a scholar and a journalist lie in her passion for helping the underserved and digging deeper into injustices often ignored in the public sphere. At Oxford, Kristine intends to continue refining her research interests in English and History.
Claire Halloran  
Wisconsin

Massachusetts Institute of Technology: BS, Materials Science and Engineering, 2020  
Proposed Oxford Course: MSc, Energy Systems, Master of Public Policy

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Career Aspirations  
Policymaker focused on using technology to accomplish rapid and just decarbonization in the United States

Claire Halloran is a senior at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology where she majors in Materials Science and Engineering. Her research focuses on developing engineering technologies to mitigate climate change, including a project on solar-to-fuel conversion reactors for concentrated solar systems with the Electrochemical Materials Laboratory in the MIT Department of Materials Science and Engineering, and an independent research project on silicon and perovskite photovoltaics. While studying abroad at Oxford, she worked on high-energy-density battery design with the Faraday Institution SOLBAT Project, and this past summer she interned at Form Energy, a startup focused on creating low-cost, long-lasting batteries. She has also interned with the Environmental Defense Fund and held climate policy fellowships at Our Climate and the Better Future Project. Claire founded the MIT Climate Action Team, a campus group that organizes in support of climate change mitigation policies. She has also served as a peer educator on issues of sexual violence, cultural values, and healthy relationships on campus.
Leanne Ho

University of Oklahoma: BA, English Literary and Cultural Studies, 2020
Proposed Oxford Course: MSc, Evidence-Based Social Intervention and Policy Evaluation

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Career Aspirations
Activist, writer, and physician

Leanne Ho is a second-generation Vietnamese American majoring in English Literary and Cultural Studies at the University of Oklahoma. They have advocated for gender-based violence prevention and LGBTQ equity through their roles as resident advisor for OU Athletics, intern for the Gender + Equality Center, chair of the LGBTQ Program Advisory Board, sexual health educator for Sexperts, and research assistant for a Psychology of Fiction lab. After protesting gendered campus awards, Leanne was recognized as the first Big Non-Binary Person on Campus; the accolade was subsequently renamed the OU Campus Life Award. As a cancer survivor and health-care policy intern for United States Senator Dianne Feinstein, Leanne strives for accessible, affordable, and inclusive health care through clinical medicine and policy intervention, with a focus on health care disparities for immigrants, people of color, and LGBTQ populations. Leanne is also a Point Scholar and has been published in the Modern Love column of The New York Times. In their free time, they enjoy glassblowing, rock climbing, playing piano, posting memes on Twitter, and hosting brunch for their loved ones every Saturday.
Arielle Hudson

University of Mississippi: BA, Secondary English Education, 2020

Proposed Oxford Course: BA, Law (Jurisprudence)

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Career Aspirations
Civil rights attorney, education policymaker

Arielle Hudson is a senior at the University of Mississippi majoring in Secondary English Education with endorsements in History and Special Education. She serves as the President of The Black Student Union and the Chair of the Inclusion and Cross-Cultural Engagement Committee in the Associated Student Body Senate. She co-authored a resolution to remove a Confederate statue from her university’s campus. She is an inductee of the University of Mississippi’s Hall of Fame and a recipient of the Gold Presidential Volunteer Service Award. As a native of the Mississippi Delta from Tunica, MS, Arielle naturally grew a passion for education equity and racial reconciliation, so she desires to create sustainable and equitable policies in Mississippi through a career in education policy and civil rights law. Her hobbies include participating in pageants, including two national pageants in which she placed 2nd runner-up and within the Top 15, respectively. She enjoys reading, activism, traveling, and spending quality time with family and friends.
Prathm Juneja

University of Notre Dame: BA, Political Science; BS, Computer Science, 2020

Proposed Oxford Course: MSc, Social Data Science and Master of Public Policy

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Career Aspirations
Government and public policy, with a focus on using technology for social good

Prathm Juneja graduated summa cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa from the University of Notre Dame’s 5-year Reilly program in January 2020. The son of Indian immigrants, he was born and raised in Edison, NJ. At Notre Dame, Prathm served as Chief of Staff to the Student Government, where he worked on issues ranging from racial inequality to housing policy. A Truman Scholar, he was a MicrosoftNY civic-technology fellow and an intern with South Bend’s Office of Innovation, where he built software to increase access to city services. He has conducted research on voter access and civic technology in Sweden, Chile, and Washington, DC. In 2018, he co-developed a voting information chatbot that was used thousands of times nationwide. He is active in local South Bend politics and voting rights and has led events to register thousands of voters. Prathm currently works for the Innovation team on Pete Buttigieg’s presidential campaign. His hobbies include craft coffee, hip hop music, and playing baseball.
Ananya Agustin Malhotra

Princeton University: AB, Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, 2020

Proposed Oxford Course: MSt, Global and Imperial History; MSt, Modern Languages

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Career Aspirations
Interdisciplinary scholar and educator

Ananya Agustin Malhotra is a senior at Princeton University, pursuing an AB in the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs with certificates in European Cultural Studies and French Language and Culture. A transdisciplinary scholar by training, Ananya explores creative approaches to histories of trauma, the politics of memory, and legacies of empire. Her senior thesis is a study of the collective remembrance of the nuclear age in America through nuclear lieux de mémoire. At Princeton, she served as President of the SHARE (Sexual Harassment/Assault Advising, Resources, & Education) Peer Program and co-founded the UN Women/Office of Religious Life Faith and Gender Justice Fellowship. She has interned at the European Roma Rights Centre in Budapest, Hungary, and at UN Women in New York. At Oxford, Ananya will continue her studies in global intellectual history and critical theory.
Sarena Martinez

Vanderbilt University: BA, Psychology (Hons), French, 2016
Proposed Oxford Course: MSc, Economic and Social History

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Career Aspirations
Helping post-industrial cities re-imagine their institutions to facilitate an inclusive economy so their residents can thrive

Sarena Martinez graduated from Vanderbilt University summa cum laude in Psychology, after receiving an AA degree from Bard College at Simon’s Rock. She currently leads strategic projects in the Department of Innovation and Economic Opportunity, which she helped launch for the City of Birmingham, AL. Her portfolio of projects includes the launch of the Birmingham Promise (a comprehensive scholarship and apprenticeship program for all Birmingham City School students), national partnership management, opportunity zone strategy and deployment and operational innovation. Sarena is motivated by a fierce urgency to help post-industrial cities usher in knowledge-based economies, renewing opportunity for people in the places that forged American prosperity. A 2017 Venture for America fellow, Sarena helped launch 2-year and 4-year scholarships at Innovate Birmingham, a $6 million federal grant program designed to train 1,000 under- and un-employed youth for tech jobs. Sarena intends to study and understand how to build capacity in local governments to facilitate more inclusive economic growth.
Olivia McGinnis
Pennsylvania

Harvard University: AB, Neuroscience, 2020
Proposed Oxford Course: MSc/DPhil, Neuroscience

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Career Aspirations
Neuroscience research

Olivia is a senior at Harvard University studying neuroscience. Her undergraduate thesis analyzes zebrafish escape response in order to gain insight into their internal models of the environment and how such models might be biologically instantiated to bias escapes. This research works towards understanding how the brain operates as a complex set of circuits to achieve behavior, a viewpoint Olivia hopes to bring to studies of neuropsychiatric disease. Olivia has been a dedicated Alzheimer’s buddy, student mental health liaison, and a member of Women in STEM in her time at Harvard. The daughter of two artists, Olivia designs and edits a journal exploring the intersection of science and art.
Luke Melas-Kyriazi

Harvard University: AB, Mathematics; MS, Computer Science, 2020
Proposed Oxford Course: DPhil, Engineering

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Career Aspirations
Undecided

Luke Melas-Kyriazi is a senior studying mathematics and computer science. Academically, Luke is interested in machine learning and its applications in healthcare and medicine. He conducts research within the Harvard Natural Language Processing group and within the Computational Health group at Boston Children’s Hospital, where he has applied machine learning methods to analyze demographic diversity in blood laboratory data. Outside of class, Luke serves as treasurer of Harvard Student Agencies, the world’s largest student-run company, and helps organize the Harvard-MIT Math Tournament. In his free time, Luke enjoys playing soccer, kayaking, and cooking.
Lily Moore-Eissenberg

Yale University: BA, Philosophy; BA, English, 2020

Proposed Oxford Course: BPhil, Philosophy

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Career Aspirations
Academic philosophy, creative non-fiction

Lily Moore-Eissenberg studies analytic philosophy and English literature. She served as editor in chief of the university’s political magazine, where she founded a section for public philosophy. She has reported on environmental activism in Texas, immigration enforcement in Ohio, and the advocacy of progressive nuns in Mexico, with publications in Slate, Texas Monthly, and Time, among others. Her philosophical interests include epistemology, action theory, ethics, and jurisprudence. She hopes to combine her passion for social justice journalism with her love of academic philosophy by becoming a writer, a philosophy professor, or both.
Christina Pao

Yale University: BA/MA, Political Science; Intensive BA, Classics, 2020

Proposed Oxford Course: MPhil, Sociology and Demography

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Career Aspirations
Academia and public service

Christina Pao completed an Intensive BA in Classics and a BA/MA in Political Science. Her academic research focuses on migration and marginalization, and she has published a theory-building piece on refugee integration with Social Science Works (Berlin). She has worked on issues of gender and displacement at international and local organizations like the International Rescue Committee, Integrated Refugee and Immigrants Services (IRIS), and Sex Workers & Allies Network (SWAN). Most recently, Christina worked for the United Nations (ESCAP), where she served as a primary drafter for a publication (Pathways to Influence: Promoting the Role of Women’s Transformative Leadership to Achieve the SDGs in Asia and the Pacific) and policy brief (“Social Development Policy Brief: Women’s Political Participation and Leadership”). A Truman Scholar, Christina has bridged her interests with politics by working for a legislative official in New Haven, the office of U.S. Senator Patty Murray, and a number of local and state campaigns. In her free time, she enjoys crocheting/knitting, playing Classical guitar, and making chocolates. She hopes to continue studying migration through the lens of sociology and demography at Oxford, before later pursuing a PhD in the United States.
Camila Pelsinger

Brown University: BA, International Relations, 2020

Proposed Oxford Course: MSc, Criminology and Criminal Justice

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Career Aspirations
Criminal legal reform to change state responses to violence and harm

Camila Pelsinger, of San Francisco, is a senior at Brown University where she is studying International Relations and Cognitive Neuroscience. Elected to Phi Beta Kappa as a junior, Camila has maintained a perfect grade point average while at Brown. Camila’s research takes an interdisciplinary approach to examining gender-based violence, culminating in her honors thesis on restorative justice responses to sexual violence. As vice president of Brown’s student government, she developed a transformative justice program to support community-based approaches to addressing harm that prioritizes the needs of victims and survivors. Camila is a leader on sexual violence prevention issues on campus, including as a coordinator for the Brown University Sexual Assault Peer Education program. At Oxford, Camila hopes to continue to examine alternative means of addressing cycles of state and interpersonal violence.
Laura Plata

Yale University: BA, Ethics, Politics, and Economics, 2019

Proposed Oxford Course: MSc, Refugee and Forced Migration Studies

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Career Aspirations
Human rights lawyer and advocate

Laura Plata is a graduate of Yale University, where she received a Bachelor of Arts in Ethics, Politics, and Economics and Certificate for the Multidisciplinary Academic Program in Human Rights. Laura devoted her time as undergraduate to defending migrants’ rights. Following her tenure as vice president of the Yale Refugee Project, she founded the first Yale campus organization dedicated to providing legal assistance to asylum seekers and undocumented immigrants in the greater New Haven area. Her scholarship and policy work seek to engage the link between the criminalization of Central American asylum seekers and a global trend towards closed borders. Laura is currently in Mexico City where she is conducting research on the impact of migration deterrence policies such as Migration Protection Protocols for individuals seeking asylum in the United States through the Institute for Women in Migration. She is eager to join the Rhodes Community at Oxford and to meet her cohort.
Jake Reagan

University of Colorado-Boulder: BA, Political Science and Spanish, 2020
Proposed Oxford Course: BA, Philosophy, Politics, and Economics

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Career Aspirations
Government

Jacob (Jake) Reagan will graduate in May of 2020 with a Bachelor’s degree in Political Science and Spanish Literature and Culture. He has worked in multiple levels of government, serving as the University of Colorado-Boulder Student Body President and an intern in both the Colorado General Assembly and the United States Senate. A Truman Scholar, Jake has volunteered as a Spanish language interpreter, founded a student organization focused on bridging political differences on college campuses, and was a 2019 Teach for America Accelerate Fellow. Before attending Oxford in the fall, Jake plans to work for the World Bank Inspection Panel and climb a number of ‘fourteeners’ in the Rocky Mountains. Jake hopes to pursue a career in public service.
Cyrus V. Reza

**Alaska**

**Stanford University:** BA, Classics; BS, Mathematics; MA, International Policy, 2020

**Proposed Oxford Course:** MPhil, History of War

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**Career Aspirations**
Military

Cyrus Reza is a senior pursuing a BA in Classics, a BS in Mathematics, and an MA in International Policy. His research focuses on the impact of Iranian regional security interests on American foreign policy. While at Stanford, he has served as a research assistant to both a former National Security Advisor and a former United States Ambassador to Afghanistan. Cyrus has worked as a diver on an excavation of a Byzantine shipwreck in Sicily, studied Russian and Russo-Belarusian relations as a Boren Scholar in Belarus, and conducted independent research in Iraq. In his free time, he enjoys skiing and adventure travel, having spent time in both Iran and North Korea, among other inhospitable countries. He plans to enter the military upon leaving Oxford.
Kritika Singh

Northeastern University: BS, Bioengineering, 2020
Proposed Oxford Course: DPhil, Biomedical Sciences

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Career Aspirations
Physician-scientist-advocate

Kritika is a senior majoring in Bioengineering and minoring in Chemistry. Kritika has maintained a perfect grade point average while exploring the intersection of bioengineering, global health, and chemical biology. She has previously conducted biomedical research in industry, academia, and the government and is currently working on epigenetics, malaria, and tool-development in the Mazitschek Lab at Massachusetts General Hospital. A recipient of the Truman and Goldwater Scholarships, Kritika understands that “science alone will not eradicate disease.” She founded and directs a nonprofit organization, Malaria Free World, which engages in peer-to-peer education, and she has worked to empower others through founding Northeastern’s Global Health Initiative which produced one of the largest student-led global health conferences in the nation. Kritika plans further her studies in biomedical research at Oxford before returning to the US for medical school. Kritika is also a licensed Bollywood fitness instructor, a foodie, and a book-lover.
Lauren Spohn, of College Station, is a senior at Harvard where she concentrates in English, with a deep interest in intellectual history. Home-schooled in an Air Force family, she is a member of Phi Beta Kappa and has a perfect academic record across literature, history, philosophy, government, and economics. Lauren founded a mentorship program for freshmen in the humanities, serves as editor in chief of Harvard’s student journal of religious thought, has won many top prizes in English, serves on numerous academic boards, and wrote an award-winning column in *The Harvard Crimson*. She is also captain of the women’s triathlon team, won a varsity letter in soccer, ran varsity track and cross-country, and is a competitive marathoner. She looks forward to continuing her studies in English and History at Oxford.
Daine Alexander Van de Wall  
Maryland/DC

United States Military Academy: BS, System and Decision Sciences, 2020
Proposed Oxford Course: MPhil, International Relations

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Career Aspirations
United States Army Infantry Officer

Born and raised in Glenelg, Maryland, Daine Van de Wall is looking forward to joining the Infantry after completing graduate studies. As the First Captain, Daine is responsible for leading the over 4,300 students which make up the Corps of Cadets. His senior capstone will leverage systems dynamics to model how strategic placement of women in military and political leadership positions in Africa may contribute to political stability on the continent. Daine hopes to combine his military background with his interests in conflict studies to help shape US foreign policy in the future.
Francisca Vasconcelos

Massachusetts Institute of Technology: BS, Electrical Engineering, Computer Science, and Physics, 2020

Proposed Oxford Course: MSc, Mathematics and Foundations of Computer Science; MSc, Statistics

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Career Aspirations
Quantum influencer

During her time at MIT, Francisca had the opportunity to perform research in a variety of EECS and physics domains, ranging from cubesat optical communication to boosting the performance of deep learning systems. Ultimately, however, through research in the MIT Engineering Quantum Systems group, she found herself “intrigued by and immersed in the world of quantum computation and information.” At Oxford, Francisca hopes to further explore classical computation and statistics in order to better prepare herself for a PhD at the intersection of machine learning and physics. In the long-term, Francisca hopes to become a university professor and perform research that will help drive forward this next revolution in computing.
Liana Wang

Yale University: BA, Economics and Human Rights, 2020
Proposed Oxford Course: MPhil, Economics

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Career Aspirations
Economist, activist, and policymaker focused on uplifting communities and reducing inequality

Liana is a senior Economics major and Human Rights Scholar with a minor equivalent in mathematics. Driven by her own experiences, she is committed to tackling poverty and improving the lives of vulnerable families. Her current work focuses on how taxes and transfers have shaped inequality in the US, and her human rights capstone focused on transnational identity. She also assists with research on transitional and racial justice and childcare subsidies for low-income families, and has worked on projects about urban-rural migration, maternal and child healthcare in Uganda, and financial stability with the European Commission. At Yale, she co-directs the Lowenstein Human Rights Project, which provides pro bono assistance to public interest NGOs, has worked with asylum seekers, and volunteers as a tax preparer. Liana will spend the summer focused on local policy to address urban displacement in Chicago, and hopes to be an economist shaping public policy. In everything, Liana hopes to put others first, treasure relationships, and elevate the voices of communities too often left unheard. She loves public goods, exploring cities, cooking new recipes, and long quiet hikes.
Henry Wu

Ohio State University: BA, Philosophy, Political Science, 2020
Proposed Oxford Course: MPhil, Political Theory

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Career Aspirations
Work at the intersection between human rights and criminal justice

Henry Wu is an Eminence Fellow and McCoy Scholar studying Philosophy and Political Science. Henry is committed to addressing the social and political determinants of forced migration and human trafficking, bringing together theory and practice to propose important policy reforms. Henry traces his passion for migration policy to his family’s own journey to the United States from China. On campus, Henry co-founded a mentorship program for juvenile victims of trafficking. He has also worked directly with survivors of human trafficking to help expunge their criminal records. For fun, Henry enjoys cooking Chinese food, brewing beer, and listening to true crime podcasts.
Megan A. Yamoah

Massachusetts Institute of Technology: BSc, Physics and Electrical Engineering, 2020
Proposed Oxford Course: MPhil, Economics

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Career Aspirations
Innovation policy development

Megan A. Yamoah is a senior majoring in Physics and Electrical Engineering. Megan’s research expertise is in the application of novel, two-dimensional materials in quantum computing. At MIT, she has served on the executive board of MIT Undergraduate Women in Physics, as the president of the MIT Society of Physics Students, and as a member of MIT DanceTroupe. She is passionate about designing innovation initiatives to drive economic growth in emerging markets. Of particular interest to her are forming the policies and designing the institutions to expand technology-based growth in East and Southeast Asia and West Africa. At Oxford, Megan will focus her studies on how innovation can positively affect emerging economies.
Eileen Z. Ying is a fourth-year student studying Politics and English Modern and Global Studies. Their academic research examines Asian diasporic speculative fiction and the construction of race under capitalism, taking biopolitics, Marxism, and affect theory as frames of reference. They are a recipient of the Jefferson Scholarship and the Michael Wagenheim Memorial Scholarship, as well as a member of the Raven Society and a Lawn Resident. Eileen chairs the Minority Rights Coalition, an umbrella organization that facilitates collective action among students of color, queer students, and low-income students on campus. They also founded and served as editor in chief of the *Virginia Review of Politics*. Last spring, Eileen designed and taught one of the nation’s only undergraduate courses on the history of Asian American activism. Outside of class, they love cooking big meals with friends, making zines, and getting unreasonably invested in B-list celebrity drama. They are committed to envisioning and enacting bottom-up political change through democratic associations and worker cooperatives, and hope to one day cultivate an extensive herb garden.
Each autumn for the last 25 years, the AARS has launched the newest class of US Rhodes Scholars (and guest Scholars from other constituencies) off to Oxford with a celebration. The “Bon Voyage” Weekend emerged from a tradition of an earlier era—the “Sailing” luncheon which preceded the Scholars embarkation for England aboard an ocean liner, and subsequently the jet airliner. The expanded celebration endures today as an expression of the AARS’ commitment to learning, fellowship, and service. It is a weekend of meeting classmates, learning about the experiences of older Scholars, and conversing with Rhodes alumni. The highlight of the weekend, a congratulatory dinner, is open to all Rhodes Scholars. The following captures some of the spirit of the 25th Bon Voyage Weekend in New York City.

The weekend began Friday, September 27th, with small group dinners hosted by area Rhodes Scholars. Designed to facilitate open conversation, these dinners prompted thoughtful and playful exchanges among Scholars-elect and older Scholars in the best tradition of the Oxford dining and common-room experience.

Saturday morning saw a welcome session, orientation, and brunch for the 32 US Scholars-elect and 5 Scholars-elect from other constituencies, respectively: Ethiopia, Jamaica, Trinidad & Tobago, Burundi, and Bermuda. The session, led by BVW Chair Emmy Probasco (Maryand/DC and Wolfson ’02), AARS President Ralph Smith (Alabama and Corpus Christi ’73), and fellow AARS Board Member Neil Brown (Iowa and Merton ’82), provided an opportunity for Scholars-elect to meet each other in a large group setting, and to learn more about the mission and activities of the AARS.

In the afternoon, thanks to considerable efforts of Board Member Jim Basker (Oregon and Christ Church ’76), Scholars-elect enjoyed a performance of Lin-Manuel Miranda’s Hamilton at the Richard Rodgers Theatre. That evening, the 37 Scholars-elect were joined by over 60 Rhodes alumni for the customary reception and celebration dinner. The Trust’s American Secretary, Elliot F. Gerson (Connecticut and Magdalen ’74) introduced the Scholars-elect. The keynote address
was delivered by Elizabeth Kiss (Virginia and Balliol ’83), Warden and CEO of The Rhodes Trust. The evening was full of thoughtful reflection, good humor, some inevitable nostalgia, and lively conversation.

On Sunday morning, Scholars-elect enjoyed breakfast on their own or with Rhodes Alumnae at the Rhodes Women’s Reunion gathering, hosted by Alexis Blane (North Carolina and St. John’s ’02), Ashley Orr (Ohio and St. John’s ’16), and Abigail Seldin (Pennsylvania and St. Antony’s ’09). All Scholars-elect convened mid-morning at the Tenement Museum for a program highlighting the enduring stories of immigration in American life.

The Sunday activities concluded with a luncheon with the members of the AARS Board of Direction and an orientation session with American Secretary Elliot Gerson. The Scholars-elect departed that evening from John F. Kennedy Airport for London’s Heathrow Airport, and thence to Oxford to begin their residency.

The 2020 Bon Voyage Weekend will be held September 25-27 in Seattle, Washington.

* * *

The Board of the AARS thanks the Rhodes Scholar volunteers who made the events of BVW 2019 possible: Nicholas W. Allard ’74, James Basker ’76, Robert S. Harrison ’76, Nnenna Lynch ’93, and Emelia Spencer Probasco ’02. Thanks also to Neil Brown and those who hosted the small group dinners: Daniel Altschuler ’06 (and classmates), Jim Basker and Janice Ugaki ’93, Pavan Cheruvu ’02, Robert and Jane Harrison, Noorain Khan ’06 and Sabeel Rahman ’05, Sue Meng ’03, David Robinson ’04, Whitney Haring-Smith ’07 and Abigail Seldin ’09, Lev Sviridov ’05 and Marissa Doran ’05, and Olivia White ’97. Alexis Blane ’02, Ashley Orr ’16, and Abigail Seldin ’09 graciously hosted the women’s reunion breakfast.

As always, thanks are due to the superb work of Joyce Knight and Thom Yu of the American Secretary’s office. The Board also extends grateful thanks to all Rhodes alumni and guests who attended the dinner and to all Rhodes alumni who support the work of AARS.

BVW is funded entirely by the contributions of AARS members. Your participation helps to welcome the newest Scholars into our community every year.
From the American Secretary

Please meet the United States Rhodes Scholar Class of 2020, as always sparkling with accomplishment and promise. They will embark on their Oxford adventures in the fall, and we wish them all well.

“Transformative” is now an overworked word. We hear of transformative teachers, classes, trips, books, evenings at the theater, even meals. And some of them may be. But we can say with certainty and deep meaning that, as Rhodes Scholars, these young Americans’ lives will be transformed.

As Rhodes House Warden Elizabeth Kiss wrote in a message to Rhodes Scholars several months ago, this year will be my last as American Secretary. And by the time you read this, my successor may have been named. Our intent is to work together for the coming selection year. This will thus be my last letter to appear in this annual celebration of a new class of Rhodes Scholars.

Therefore it seems also an appropriate time to reflect, albeit briefly, about some of the things that have changed—and what has not—in the 22 years since I became the American Secretary of the Trust.

First, the enormous privilege to meet successive classes of Rhodes Scholars remains an extraordinary gift, and a joy. This responsibility is the most effective antidote I can imagine to the cynicism that often otherwise accompanies aging, especially in times so politically challenging if not enraging. These remarkable young people brim with optimism about how they can change the world for the better. And I know from experience that they will.

The Founder’s pathbreaking criteria for selection are essentially the same today as they were two decades ago, and indeed are essentially those from when the Scholarships were launched well over a century ago. Cecil Rhodes sought excellence, firmly grounded by truly exceptional intellectual attainment, but rounded and crowned with strength of character; instincts to lead; energy and ambition; the ability to work effectively with others; and concern for those less fortunate. We still seek the same today. Some words of guidance have changed—for example, “success in sports” is no longer an explicit criterion, although Rhodes’ intent regarding his inclusion of this remains—but the core is no different.

The heart of our selection process, the personal interview, remains sacrosanct. And the fundamental elements of the application are unchanged: a personal statement of 1,000 words, a transcript, a list of principal activities and awards, a university endorsement, and 5-8 letters of recommendation. The receptions and interview days that led to the selection of this class are very much as all earlier Rhodes Scholars recall.

Our Scholars of course still must become students at the University of Ox-
ford. Our award remains tethered to serious academic work there for two or more years. It is not a prize for expected future leadership; it is an investment in people likely to thrive in challenging scholarly exercise guided by Oxford faculty.

And it remains preeminent in the world, even with welcomed and superb new entrants also providing graduate international fellowships.

And Oxford is as magical and beautiful as ever, perhaps—if possible—more so.

What has changed?

Although hard to believe, the academic standards of our Scholars-elect get higher every year. This has been essential as Oxford has grown ever more competitive, often leading respected global league tables as the best university in the world, and with increasing emphasis on the quality of its graduate programs. The vast majority of Scholars now do graduate degrees, with many doing consecutive one-year master’s degrees that did not exist two decades ago. These graduate degrees are now available in literally more than 100 subjects, though each year a few Scholars find the still-splendid BA optimal. With many more doing doctorates, the average tenure of the American Scholarships now exceeds two years.

And Rhodes House has gone from playing a very small role in the Oxford experience of Rhodes Scholars in the 1990s (and for all decades before then) to a lead role today, with seminars, lectures, roundtables, forums and social events complementing the still vital roles of colleges, faculties, teams, artistic organizations, clubs and the like.

Our applicant pool has become far more representative of students in the United States: by gender, race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, economic class, immigration status, academic discipline, and university origin. And so has the profile of our winners.

Some rules and processes have changed, but only modestly on the whole. Perhaps the biggest changes have resulted from my efforts to level the competition playing field and enhance the fairness of the process, including a move from a dual state and district process to one of districts alone, with districts designed and occasionally adjusted to have approximately equally sized pools, and by splitting the most populous states. We have also expanded eligibility to many Americans before denied, including residents of US territories, legal permanent residents, Dreamers, and most recently those slightly older than most students in their cohort because of financial, medical or family hardship or for other reasons as well, including military or other service before college.

And my job as admissions counselor to Scholars-elect has become massively easier, with the development of a very professional office under the
Rhodes House Registrar providing timely and supplemental advice about courses. This is hugely significant as another key change is that most Scholars-elect today change their course preference after their selection, and many of Oxford’s graduate courses have become so competitive that many Rhodes Scholars are not admitted to their first choices. (A key reason for this is that most American Rhodes Scholars have such broad interests that they are often keen to pursue subjects they have not studied extensively already—as would be the case for applicants from the UK and most other countries who thus appear more qualified in those subjects.) But our Scholars have usually still found a very happy academic home or homes. A majority now apply to more than one course from the outset.

Finally, one other important and imminent change must be noted: the retirement of Bob Wyllie as Rhodes House Head Porter. His tenure for the Rhodes Trust has—from start to retirement—largely matched mine, and we have been close friends throughout. Bob and his Bob- and Rhodes-devoted wife Dawn were my best antennae into the welfare of Rhodes Scholars in residence, and the passionate heart of the Rhodes experience for a generation of Rhodes Scholars. They are, simply, irreplaceable. Rhodes Scholars fortunate enough to have been graced by their warmth, empathy, and friendship had an experience like none before or after. Their bungalow on South Parks Road, aside the Rotunda, was the home-away-from-home for countless Rhodes Scholars, including many suffering through one or more of life’s inevitable hardships. It is somehow fitting that with the ambitious Rhodes House construction projects no one else will ever live in it.

So, the class we recognize and honor as you read this is in many ways like those we all recall, but it also has benefitted from subtle changes in the process, and from steady improvements and expansions in the University and in Rhodes House. Though they will miss the special magic of Bob and Dawn.

And, as for all those that preceded it, the experience awaiting will be transformative.

Elliot F. Gerson  
(Connecticut and Magdalen ’74)  
American Secretary, Rhodes Trust
About the Rhodes Scholarships

The Rhodes Scholarships were established in 1902 by the Will of Cecil Rhodes, the British philanthropist and colonial pioneer. Rhodes hoped that the Scholarships might improve “the lot of humankind through the diffusion of leaders motivated to serve their contemporaries, trained in the contemplative life of the mind, and broadened by their acquaintance with one another and by their exposure to cultures different from their own.” Rhodes intended that his plan of bringing able students from throughout the English-speaking world and beyond to study at Oxford University would “aid in the promotion of international understanding and peace.” (See further Oxford and The Rhodes Scholarships.) Each year, 32 Americans are among approximately 80 Rhodes Scholars selected world-wide to take up degree courses at Oxford.

Cecil Rhodes wrote that Rhodes Scholars should “esteem the performance of public duties as their highest aim” and outlined four criteria of selection: 1) literary and scholastic attainments; 2) energy to use one’s talents to the full; 3) truth, courage, devotion to duty, sympathy for and protection of the weak, kindliness, unselfishness, and fellowship; and 4) moral force of character and instincts to lead, and to take an interest in one’s fellow beings.

Interested applicants are encouraged to consult the fellowship office of their own college or university, or the American Secretary of the Rhodes Scholarship Trust: Elliot F. Gerson, 8229 Boone Blvd., Suite 240, Vienna, VA 22182. Phone: (703) 821-5960. Fax: (703) 821-2770. E-mail: amsec@rhodesscholar.org. Or visit the web site at: www.rhodesscholar.org.

About the Association of American Rhodes Scholars

The AARS brings US Rhodes Scholars together in support of the Rhodes Scholarship and Oxford University. We hold events at which Scholars can connect, and we publish their news in print and online—creating opportunities for Scholars to reflect together on our shared experiences. We work to promote connection and goodwill among the peoples of all countries from which Rhodes Scholars and other Oxonians are drawn. We strive to foster the qualities of learning, leadership, and service that are the essence of the Scholarship.

AARS plans and supports several activities including national and class reunions, regional events, and the Bon Voyage Weekend/Orientation for new Scholars. The Association publishes an annual newsletter, The American Rhodes Scholar, as well as the quarterly journal, The American Oxonian, which includes articles, book reviews, class letters and the annual Address and Occupations List of American Rhodes Scholars and other Oxonians. It also hosts the website www.americanrhodes.org. It administers the Eastman Professorship Trust and the American Trust for Oxford (ATFO). AARS members pay modest dues annually; many members also make generous additional donations. AARS does not receive funding from the Rhodes Trust nor does it have responsibility for the Rhodes Scholar selection process in the US.

For membership and further information, contact Nicholas W. Allard, AARS Secretary, c/o AARS, 8229 Boone Blvd., Suite 240, Vienna, VA 22182. Or visit the AARS link on the internet from: www.rhodesscholar.org or directly at: www.americanrhodes.org.