

2020-2021 Scholars – Letters of Appreciation

From: Sriyans Rauniyar '24 <rauniyar@princeton.edu>

Dear Alan,
I hope you are doing well.

I am extremely sorry for not being able to respond to you on time twice. I can understand this is not something you expect from any of your scholarship recipients. However, I have been in a tremendous situation for the past few weeks. My father tested positive [for corona virus] and we all had to isolate ourselves. Slowly, my elder sister showed symptoms too followed by me. We all were going through tough times. Plus, I haven't been able to travel to the states yet. The timezone here is crazy. I know this doesn't sound like a valid reason for being unresponsive for weeks but I assure you I wasn't ignoring the emails. I apologize again.

Regarding the questions, I will write everything about myself today and send you an email in a few hours from now. Thank you so much for reaching out to me again. I hope you understand.

With warm regards from Nepal,

Sriyans Rauniyar

[Later]

Dear Alan,
Here's everything about me and my aspirations from Princeton.

I am Sriyans Rauniyar, the youngest of the three children in a family of five. I was born and raised in the capital of Nepal, Kathmandu. I was always very interested in studying in the US. I had heard stories of how advanced the institutions in the US are and American life always intrigued me. I, thus, wanted to apply to the US when I was in my senior year of high school. However, finances were a major concern. Initially, when I had shared this to some of my friends, they told me costs that I simply couldn't afford at that time. The standardized tests, application fee, enrollment fee, visa costs, travel costs, it was all too overwhelming for me. Even though I badly wanted to apply to test my chances of getting accepted, I sadly couldn't even begin my process. However, I knew of a life-changing opportunity

called the "Opportunity Funds", an initiative by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs to make U.S. higher education more accessible to non-elite international students from disadvantaged backgrounds and administered by the United States Educational Foundation in Nepal. The program selects 14-16 students each year and funds their entire upfront costs involved in the application process including visa and travel. The program was the only hope for me. However, after my graduation from high school, I got to know that I had missed the deadline by a week. So, I chose to take a national examination for undergrad engineering school here. I secured a very good rank and got a full scholarship in the top engineering school. However, I knew I would regret my entire life if I choose not to apply at all. I dropped the engineering school here, waited for a year, and applied for the program. Fortunately, I made it through. I was one of the 16 students selected from all over Nepal and that marked my first step towards my dream of studying in the US.

As soon as I got into the program, I was very grateful. I wanted to make the most out of the opportunity I had received. I used to spend my entire day at the USEF's library preparing for my tests, researching schools, and crafting my application. Here's a funny thing though. As I was selecting schools to apply to, Princeton was a school I never wanted to apply to. The apparent image of Princeton I had was a nerdy school with a toxic ambiance. However, two of my friends really pushed me to apply to Princeton. It's very strange that I used only the very last day of the deadline to craft my application to Princeton. However, when the results were announced, Princeton was the only ivy league I got into. The rest of the four ivies I applied to ended up waitlisting me. Apart from Princeton, I got into 8 other schools with full-rides and also became the first Nepali to receive the Brown Scholarship at Center College. The application process was a great run for me.

Fast forward to my beginning days at Princeton, The initial days were very confusing for me. Everything online made so lesser sense to me. I had never been in such circumstances. I was worried about my frosh experience at Princeton. The differences in the education system posed another challenge plus the timezone was crazy. Everything was so overwhelming. I am just thankful that Princeton let me know everything so well. From getting timely emails to the freshman website, everything helped me manage my initial days very well. The registrar thing was crazy too, I couldn't sign up for a class I so wanted to take. Eventually, I got normalized with everything though. I really loved how Princeton shapes its undergraduate experience though. From precepts to the lectures, everything is overwhelmingly interesting. The class discussions are too intriguing and taking classes ranging from arts to sciences to history just gives everything one can

seek. Academically, I am more inclined towards being a tech entrepreneur. So, I am planning to major in BSE with a degree in Computer Science while also taking certificate courses in Entrepreneurship, Data Science, and Finance. I don't know yet if I will be able to complete it all but I am definitely inclined towards these fields of studies. However, I am also interested in history, geopolitics, journalism, and economics.

Talking about extracurriculars, I have always been active in my community. In my high school, I led the formation of a students' council in my school after almost two decades of its establishment. I led the council as a founder president and opened 11 clubs under the council. After graduation, I have been acting as a mentor and advisor to subsequent presidents. In addition, I am a central executive member of the Nepal Youth Council-the largest youth-led social org in my country. I have led several national and regional projects including a national sanitation campaign, a national plantation campaign, a project on solid waste management, and I have played a crucial role in organizing several national and provincial youth conferences here. Further, I have also involved in numerous events and projects that have had, more or less, a positive impact on the targeted community. In addition to social engagement, I have always been an athletic person. I am fond of basketball and cricket and have played both sports at a competitive level as well. I am also into swimming, running, badminton, tennis, and a few more. It's just that I have been athletic my entire life and it makes me content. Also, I have been involved with olympiads and academic events as well throughout my high school and in my gap year as well. I had been selected in six international events to represent Nepal. Unfortunately, I couldn't attend any because of financial issues.

My frosh year at Princeton has been full of excitement, intriguing discussions, and timezone issues. Initially, it was an issue keeping up with the schedule in an already difficult time zone. The classes were very different than what I was used to. Everything on zoom made it even more difficult. All I was doing was joining in, taking some notes, and trying to understand it on my own. Whenever confused, I used to shoot an email to either the professor or the TAs. However, I slowly got used to it. There were consequences though. I went completely nocturnal, sleeping during the day, taking classes in the evening, and dealing with Psets and other social events during the night and early morning. It was difficult the first few days but I got used to it quickly. Also, online education heavily impacted my Princeton experience. It was a constant struggle to manage classes and join certain social events. I rarely joined any sessions that weren't part of my academics, honestly. I missed a lot, I believe. I couldn't reach out to a lot of alumni nor make connections

with a lot of Princeton students nor fully experience Princeton at all. I still lament not being able to do any of it for an entire year. It's definitely something I will lament during my time here at Princeton.

Princeton matters a lot to me in my undergrad journey and beyond. As I mentioned, I wish to be a tech entrepreneur and I know how significant Princeton education will be in my path to be one. At Princeton, I am looking forward to honing my academic skills, my interpersonal skills, my oratory skills, and my leadership and communication skills. Hopefully, at the end of my life at Princeton, I can become a leader who can create an immensely positive impact globally through tech entrepreneurship, something I am aspiring for. In addition, I also want to explore as much as I can here. I took classes ranging from Economics to History to Entrepreneurship and am looking forward to exploring more. All I want to do is make myself more curious to learn and more thirsty to explore. Beyond Princeton, I just want to carry on with the foundation Princeton education is gonna lay for me. I want to definitely complete Ph.D. and then go on to work globally. I aspire to work with people of various backgrounds from various nations and, hopefully, travel the globe as I work.

Coming back to Covid, the situation hasn't been too easy for people in Nepal including me and my family. During the first wave, we entered into one of the longest lockdowns lasting for almost a year. As the situation seems to get better, the second wave hit us and it's been almost a month since we have entered another lockdown now. The healthcare system here is already fragile and the incompetence of the government to handle the situation is not helping as well. In terms of academics, apart from hurting my Princeton experience, the pandemic didn't affect me too much. Mentally, I wasn't challenged much since I was with my family and we had no issues whatsoever. Everything I needed, I had already bought everything right before lockdown and that sufficed for both semesters.

Lastly, I want to put this here. Nepal is now on the brink of collapse as covid ravages the country (much like India, except it has gotten less attention internationally). In the face of the current humanitarian crisis in South Asia, Nepal's government/ health system is already failing, and things are only getting worse. Hospital beds have run out, crematoriums have been inundated, and oxygen is in short supply. Nepal is grossly underprepared to tackle this crisis on its own and to help the most vulnerable tackle the pandemic, I, with a few friends of mine, set up a Go Fund Me to get help from the international community and started a group called the Student Coalition for Nepal. Here's the link to the fundraiser and the website.

<https://gofund.me/d1d7f07d>

www.covidfundnepal.com

I put this here because we want to reach out to as many people as we possibly can. I believe, with your help, we can reach out to some Princeton alumni as well. I request you to please share this, if possible, and help us raise funds to get enough resources to vulnerable people and the poor in tackling this pandemic.

Also, Alan, I am happy to share with you that, me and my family, we have almost recovered from Covid now. It took us almost a couple of weeks but all of us are now healthy and we have revived well. I still get a bit of headache at times but everything else looks good. We are testing in the next couple of days and I will definitely write to you what the results will be. This is a challenging time and I really pray for you and your family to be safe and sound. I took a lot of time sending this to you and I, from the bottom of my heart, apologize. It's not that I am this tardy in responding to emails but the situation has been very different for me in the last few weeks, and the finals added a bit of challenge too. Hopefully, everything I have mentioned answers your question. If not, please feel free to send me an email, and I promise I will be very responsive from now on. Thank you for being so patient and for reaching out to me time and again. I can sense the warmth a Princeton tiger gets from its alumni and I feel blessed to be a part of this community. Also, I want to add this here. Had I not received generous financial aid coming from you all, US education would still be a dream for me. I consider myself blessed to be studying at one of the best schools in the world without having to worry about financials. Thank you so very much. I cannot express how grateful I and my family are to everyone who has helped to make this journey so far and beyond easier for me.

This has now become a very long email and I hope it doesn't bother you too much, but if there are things I have missed, please do let me know. Also, please do share the article you'll be writing, I am more than eager to read it once it's online. Thank you so much again. I will be waiting for a response from your side. Please take care of yourself and I am really looking forward to meeting you soon.

With warm regards from Nepal,
Sriyans Rauniyar

From: Aidan Zentner '23 <azentner@princeton.edu>

I am from Montreal and I'm the youngest of 4 boys. I spent a lot of my childhood in the countryside about an hour outside of the city, where there was very little light pollution, so we always had really incredible views of the stars, and this sparked my initial interest in space and physics.

Princeton is really exciting not only because of the quality of the physics teaching but also because of the opportunities that undergrads have to do work with professors. A few weeks ago, I officially declared physics as my major, and I've been doing research on self-interacting dark matter with a professor in the department for about a year now.

Outside of physics, my main extracurricular is visual art. I spend a lot of my time off painting and drawing. Right now, I mostly do realism. Most of the bigger projects that I do is commissioned work, which I've been doing for about 5 or 6 years now, but I'm planning to take some time to just practice and explore different styles. When I'm not doing physics or art, I really enjoy reading history and playing volleyball (I'm the president of club volleyball here at Princeton). Recently, I've also become very passionate about environmental issues, and I'm pursuing a certificate in environmental studies.

In terms of my aspirations for the remainder of my time at Princeton, I really just hope to learn as much as possible and to work with some really incredible professors. I'm going into my junior year and I'm very excited to start independent work in physics. Right now, I'm very interesting in exploring cosmology, which I see as the field that I am most likely to pursue, but I'm hoping to try out some different fields in my independent work to give me a better sense of what fields most excite me.

After Princeton, as of now, my hope is to go to grad school to continue my studies. However, as I said, I'm also very interested in environmental issues, and so regardless of whether or not I go to grad school, I would like to have some sort of hand in working towards a more sustainable future.

This year has been a little bit draining with the pandemic. I do feel like I've lost some of my Princeton experience, but ultimately there are much worse positions to be in and I'm very lucky that I had a safe place to stay during the pandemic and that my family is all healthy. I spent the fall at home in Montreal, and while it was difficult to study effectively from home, it was nice to have more time with my family

than I would otherwise have gotten.

I hope this gives you a better sense of who I am as a person! Thank you again for reaching out and I wish you good health in the months ahead.

Best,
Aidan

From: Gregory Sholars '22 <gsholars@princeton.edu>

This is actually the first I'm hearing of my reviewing of this award so thank you for the news!

As for some brief details about myself, as you know I'm a member of the class of '22, and I am concentrating in sociology. After graduation, I seek to pursue my MBA at another university, and pursue a career in consulting, marketing, or as an analyst.

Beyond academics I'm a member of the Track and Field team, where I am a 3 time Ivy League champion, and have twice been named 2nd Team All-Ivy. I rank in the top 10 athletes in Princeton history in 5 different events.

Furthermore I am a member of the board of Princeton's Black Men's Association, seeking to create a more inclusive and united community not just for Black men, but for all students.

The challenges wrought by Covid-19 have been plentiful, but I'm grateful for the resilience I've gained during my time at Princeton. Of course, as a student-athlete I've been affected in more than one way with not only my traditional educational experience being interrupted, but by having the last two years of my athletic career put on hold.

Facing the rigor of my coursework with limited access to my peers and socialization, and without freedom to do many of the things I'm passionate about has been challenging, but nonetheless I've been able to enjoy my classes and actually continue to improve overall as a student as a person.

I find my professors' and coaches' continued passion through these trying times incredibly reassuring, and have worked not to take my time at this wonderful place, in whatever capacity that may be, for granted.

In working to value even the little things every day, I find myself energized in my studies, my athletic training, and in my social pursuits. The pandemic has affected everyone, but I'm grateful for the ways Princeton has helped me face it.

All my best and my respect from a fledgling tiger to a member of one of our great classes,

Gregory Sholars II '22

[In a follow-up letter, I asked Greg how he manages to maintain his competitive edge under the restrictions imposed by COVID-19]

In regards to maintaining my competitiveness and focus, I've relied heavily on my teammates. Of course, I'm overwhelmingly passionate about my sport, and that is what gets me through the vast majority of the hours I spend training. Although these days it sometimes feels like work with no rewards as we aren't competing. However, in times when I start to doubt or second guess anything my teammates are always there to pick me up, and I am the same to them. That's actually one of the best things about Princeton, there's a familial nature of not just my team but of all the friends I've made here.

Whatever things may look like for my senior year, I will make the best of the time I have!

My best,

Greg

From Zachary Lopez '23

Good morning Mr. Mayers,

I am super grateful to be this year's recipient of the John Kennedy Ewing IV Memorial Scholarship. Please extend my thanks to the Class of 1954.

A little bit about myself, I am an international student concentrating in BSE COS, on track to be a software engineer and AI developer. In my time at Princeton, I've co-developed three web applications to help students connect during the quarantine season. Outside of academic life, I am also an avid roboticist, volleyball player, and musical theater actor. Next year, I am excited to be a new RCA at Forbes.

As I continue my studies at Princeton, I hope to create larger projects with the robotics club and participate in research regarding sustainability and entrepreneurship in computer science. Furthermore, I want to work with the McGraw Learning Center in the future to automate the scheduling and grouping process for study groups. Finally, after Princeton, I will be coming back to the Philippines to establish a software development company that will help close the technological gap between Filipinos and the rest of the world.

During this past year, I have been taking classes in the Philippines which is 12 hours time difference from EST. This was a challenge during the beginning since I was never a night person. However, Princeton faculty has been able to uphold the well-being of its international students through alternative class times, recorded lectures, and plenty of take-home exams. Hence, I was able to spread my course load throughout the day, instead of taking them all at night.

Aside from academic challenges, I have also been helping my family with financials. Inflation has not been kind in the Philippines as well in the past year. As a result, instead of going to room, board, and airfare like a normal school year, a portion of my financial aid goes to paying some of the bills at home. Hence, I am grateful to Princeton for providing the same level of financial aid, and I am thankful to the Class of 1954 for awarding me the scholarship.

Once again, thank you for reaching out to me and letting me share more about myself with the great Class of 1954.

All the best,
Zachary Lopez