Class of 2023 George J. Mitchell Scholars Announced

For Immediate Release
November 19, 2022

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The US-Ireland Alliance has announced the 12 members of the George J. Mitchell Scholar Class of 2024 following virtual interviews earlier today. As one of the country's most prestigious scholarship programs, it sends future American leaders to the island of Ireland for a year of graduate study.

This year, 306 individuals applied for the 12 scholarships. Among the recipients are an archeologist, three AI innovators, and a breast cancer researcher interested in inter-generational physiological stress prompted by historical events such as the Great Famine. Serena Wilson, Director of the Mitchell Scholarship program, said that three universities -- William & Mary, the University of Pittsburgh, and Emory University – have their first Mitchell Scholars.

Trina Vargo, founder and president of the US-Ireland Alliance and the scholarship program, noted that "next year is an important anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement. Senator Mitchell was pivotal to achieving the peace that Northern Ireland has enjoyed for the past the 25 years, and we celebrate as this program nears its own quarter century of success."

Members of the selection committee included **Her Excellency Geraldine Byrne-Nason**, Ireland's Ambassador to the United States; **Monica Bell**, a Mitchell Scholar alum and Associate Professor of Law and Associate Professor of Sociology at Yale; **Kerry Healey**, President of the Center for Advancing the American Dream at the Milken Institute in Washington, D.C.; **Ty McCormick**, a Mitchell Scholar alum and Senior Editor at *Foreign Affairs;* **Harry McNamara**, a Mitchell Scholar alum, lecturer at Princeton, and the scientific co-founder of c16 Biosciences; and **Donna McPartland**, Counsel at Han Santos, where she co-leads the Data Privacy and Cybersecurity practice.

Major supporters of the program include Ireland's Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Michael Hackman of The MBS Group and Hackman Capital and Strong Roots, a vegan food company founded by Sam Dennigan. Modern Hire provides the video component part of the interview process. The Scholars will begin their studies in Ireland in September 2023.

*founder Trina Vargo recently spoke with Jeffrey Young of EdSurge about the endowment: https://www.edsurge.com/news/2022-11-15-why-one-of-the-most-selective-scholarship-programs-could-shut-down

George J. Mitchell Scholars, Class of 2024

Vikram Balasubramanian, a resident of San Ramon, California, is a senior at the University of Pennsylvania, where he studies Philosophy in the School of Arts and Sciences, and Statistics at the

Wharton School. As a Benjamin Franklin Scholar and Joseph Wharton Scholar, Vikram is interested in combining philosophy with data science to solve social problems. On campus, Vikram is a member of the Penn Debate Society and the Philomathean Society, America's oldest continuously-existing literary society. He is also a cellist in the Penn Baroque Ensemble. As a research assistant at Penn Medicine and the Computational Social Science Center, Vikram is a co-author of several medical publications. At McKinsey & Co. and QualRisk, he analyzed bank and insurance markets and examined how to increase federal regulatory compliance. As a Project Leader for MUSE Social Impact Consulting, Vikram led four analytical projects for non-profits, including the World Wildlife Fund UK and Teach for America, to determine the effectiveness of their initiatives. Seeking to support his generation's thinking about the accumulation of wealth, he was an Effective Altruism Cambridge Fellow and served as a grant writer for One for the World, a non-profit that aims to persuade young professionals to donate 1% of their lifetime salary to philanthropic organizations. He was previously a Salaam Fellow for Conflict Resolution and a National Security Language Initiative for Youth scholarship recipient. Vikram will study Philosophy at Trinity College Dublin**.**

Alexandra Bennion, a resident of Tampa, Florida, is a senior Biology major at Duke University. Her research is focused on Inflammatory Breast Cancer, which disproportionately affects African Americans. She is identifying unique target biomarkers for predicting drug efficacy. She has already co-authored several papers and presented at several professional conferences. Alexandra has conducted independent research to understand how adaptive stress influences cancer cell death. Her senior thesis is a critical part of a multi-million-dollar National Cancer Institute clinical trial and has a forthcoming publication under review in the journal Cancers. Noting that Ireland has the third highest cancer rate in the world, Alexandra is interested in the possibility that inter-generational physiological stress, prompted by historical events such as the Great Famine, still impacts cancer gene expression in the Irish today. She has also co-founded and is developing a first-in-world mobile app for monitoring breast health changes using interactive breast model and period cycle tracking. She leads the student chapter of the American Medical Women's Association; is the President and Co-Founder of the Student Coalition for Rare Diseases. For Duke's Honor Council she founded a "Normalizing Failure in Research" weekend where undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty from the Durham area congregate, display negative data, and discuss their experiences with failure to promote integrity and inclusivity in academia. She has served young people in her community, including organizing a bereavement camp for children experiencing a close family death. A classically trained clarinetist she is part of several symphonies. Hoping to complete a project profiling the unique epigenetic signatures of breast cancer among Irish women, Alexandra will study Translational Oncology at Trinity College Dublin.

Alexander Firestine, a resident of Germantown, Maryland, is a senior at the University of Pittsburgh where he studies Finance, Accounting, and Business Information Systems. Alex is the recipient of a Chancellor's Scholarship, the university's most prestigious undergraduate scholarship. His interest is in food insecurity and how data analytics, may be used to alleviate the problem. Involved with Food21, a nonprofit committed to building resilient food systems, Alex co-led a project that developed a digital tool using data to measure regional food insecurity and identify areas where food apartheids may exist in Pittsburgh. He is investigating the relationship between accessibility of food outlets via public transportation and rates of food insecurity and is identifying pickup areas for the implementation of a virtual grocery store, bringing sustainable food to thousands in need. Alex served as Corporate Relations Manager of Enactus, a national organization that promotes social entrepreneurship. As President of the League of Emerging Analytics Professionals, he led an organization of more than 120 members who teach entry level workshops for programs like Python and Tableau. He also designed a university-accredited extracurricular institute that now teaches

analytics to 300+ students as a core class. During his time as President, the organization was awarded #1 student organization at Pitt. He is heavily involved in service work and personally contact-less delivered more than 10,000 meals during COVID. Alex will study Climate Change, Agriculture, and Food Security at University of Galway.

Michael Frim, a resident of Skokie, Illinois, is a senior at Harvard where he studies Archaeology and Physics. He was a student board member of Harvard Hillel. He has spent many summers as a sailing instructor at Northwestern University Sailing Center, teaching children and adults. As part of Harvard's Doyle Lab, he conducted research in the field of AMO physics (atomic, molecular, and optical physics) with a focus on using molecular spectroscopy to develop future molecular laser-cooling mechanisms. He designed a computer algorithm for the analysis of experimental data. The research ultimately led him to co-author a piece in *Nature Chemistry*. Volunteering at Harvard Museums of Science and Culture, Michael introduced children and adults to the field of archaeology. His interest in archaeology was inspired by his interest in the timeless nature of place. His introduction to the languages and literature of medieval Ireland and Wales led to a deep interest in Celtic archaeology. Last summer, he participated in an excavation in County Meath, Ireland, home to some of the most significant prehistoric monuments on the island, including Newgrange and the Hill of Tara. He was involved in the dig of the Black Friary, a 13th-century Dominican friary in the town of Trim. He learned archaeological excavation techniques, including stratigraphic analysis and ethical practices for the treatment of archaeological human remains. He also aided in preparing finds for storage in the National Museum of Ireland's archives. Michael will study Celtic Civilisation at University College Cork.

Teresa Gao, a resident of Provo, Utah, is a senior at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), where she studies Computer Science & Engineering as well as Brain & Cognitive Sciences. Teresa is interested in artificial intelligence and the development of autonomous agents. She has conducted research in a range of fields, including psycholinguistics in the MIT Brain and Cognitive Sciences Department, social robots for mental health in the MIT Media Lab, and machine learning architectures for biological images in the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard. Currently, she is working to establish cognitive benchmarks for AI in the MIT Quest for Intelligence. Her love for science is only equaled by her passion for creativity and the arts. She hosts an educational radio show, "Psycholochat: Where Neuroscience Meets Philosophy," on WMBR 88.1 FM, where she investigates topics in psychology, neuroscience, and philosophy. Additionally, Teresa is completely self-taught on the viola and yet has earned a highly competitive seat in the MIT Chamber Music Society. She also acts as co-president of Ribotones, a student group which plays music as service throughout the Boston community, and she performs with the competitive MIT Bhangra dance team. Her other involvements include tutoring fellow MIT students through the IEEE-Eta Kappa Nu Honor Society, managing logistics for the annual Battlecode programming competition, and volunteering as a supporter for the anonymous campus textline, Lean On Me. Teresa will study Augmented and Virtual Reality at Trinity College Dublin.

Vivek Kanpa, a resident of Livingston, New Jersey, is a senior at Northeastern University, where he studies Data Science and Biology. Vivek is interested in linking gene expression patterns and machine learning to oncology. He conducted impressive STEM research while still in high school evaluating social motivations for self-deception in the medial prefrontal cortex using transcranial magnetic stimulation. The findings were presented at national conferences and published in the Journal of Brain Sciences. Vivek received the PEAK Trail-Blazer award for investigating how oxidative stress impacts aging in nematode C. elegans neuronal tissue to explain pathogenesis of age-associated neurodegenerative disorders in humans, such as Alzheimer's. At Takeda Pharmaceutical, he developed

software tools that accelerate laboratory workflows in immunotherapy lead discovery. He then took his curiosity for targeted therapies to Revolution Medicines, where he focused on pharmacogenomics, the study of how genes effect a person's response to drugs and developed a neural network to predict successful tumor penetration of anti-cancer drugs. When he is not in a lab, Vivek is a Resident Assistant for his dormitory at Northeastern; he is a distance runner, including training for the Boston Marathon and a top 50 finisher in a California 500-mile race; and he creates music and performs live across Boston. Vivek was also a Teaching Assistant in the Computer Science, Biology and Engineering Departments at Northeastern, and he connects with prospective students from historically underrepresented communities as an Access & Diversity Fellow. Vivek will study Artificial Intelligence for Medicine & Medical Research at University College Dublin.

Macken Keefe, a resident of Lake Arrowhead, California, is a senior at Michigan State University, where he is a member of the Honors College. He studies Political Science and Global and International Studies. Interested in Northern Ireland, he has researched Gordon Allport's intergroup contact theory, which posits that the negative biases between two people groups can be mitigated by way of positive contact between members of those groups. Macken notes that, as Northern Ireland remains highly segregated, Catholics and Protestants continue to subscribe to different histories of the last century. He is also interested in how immigrants to Northern Ireland fit into the society today. Also interested in the representation of unrepresented populations in the media, his research project on the portrayal of drug users by NBC Nightly News during the crack cocaine epidemic of the 1980's, and the opioid epidemic of the 2010's, has been accepted for publication in the *Journal of Law, Medicine, and Ethics*. Serving as a legal intern for a non-profit organization that provides free legal services to asylum seekers, and interning for a judge and a law firm, has solidified his goal of becoming a lawyer who supports marginalized communities. He is also a camp counselor at a camp for children whose parents are affected by cancer and meets with a senior once a week as part of program that seeks to combat age-related loneliness, due to COVID-19, in Greater Lansing. Macken will study Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation at Trinity College Dublin, Belfast.

Rabhya Mehrotra, a resident of Bethesda, Maryland, is a senior at Yale studying Computer Science and Political Science. Her passion lies in reforming democracy to empower citizens. In the summer of 2021, Rabhya lived in Iceland as part of the Program in Grand Strategy, studying the country's 2010 constitutional reform process, which used citizen-drafters instead of politicians. She is preparing articles for publication on her findings. For her dual-major thesis, Rabhya is using natural language models to analyze Icelandic political discourse around the constitution. Within Ireland, she is eager to study successful citizens' assemblies. She is interested in Ireland's "We the Citizens" project, which involved three Citizens Assemblies that led to change on same-sex marriage and abortion. She wants to see what America can learn from Ireland. She's also eager to use her coding skills for democracy reform. Living in Dublin, the technology capital of Europe, will allow her to explore the burgeoning field of e-democracy. Rabhya's interest in understanding how people create and deliberate opinions drove her activities at Yale. She served as Co-Opinion Editor at the Yale Daily News, creating the first independent Editorial Board. She also spent a gap semester reporting for the New Haven Independent. She served as Co-Director of the Yale Politics Initiative, bringing American political players for one-off seminars with students. She has competed for the Yale Debate Association in American Parliamentary Debate and helped run the team's annual high school tournament. Rabhya will study Political Communication at Dublin City University.

Alexa Mohsenzadeh, a resident of Atlanta, Georgia, is a senior at Emory University studying Neuroscience and Behavioral Biology and Ethics. She received Emory's most prestigious merit scholarship, the Robert W. Woodruff Scholarship, for demonstrating outstanding achievement in

academics and music. As the Co-Founder and CEO of the nonprofit Her Drive, Alexa has led the distribution of 1.1 million period and hygiene products globally, including 45 states across the US, the UK, Canada, and Mexico since 2020. Through this work, she has mentored over 1200 volunteers and supported a diverse range of populations, including immigrant detainees and refugees, low-income students, rural and Indigenous communities, LGBTQ+ youth, and survivors of domestic violence. Recognized as 1 of "50 Period Heroes" nationwide, Her Drive is partnering with Always and Walmart this year to distribute 50,000 period products to people in need in Georgia, Illinois, and Louisiana. At Emory, Alexa has conducted research in neuroethics, compassion-based ethics, and feminist neuroscience with aims to integrate feminist, cross-cultural perspectives into our scientific and legal awareness. This past year, she also worked for the nonprofit, New American Pathways, where she supported newly arriving refugees in Georgia by improving their access to community resources as they underwent the resettlement process. She is the principal percussionist of the Emory University Symphony Orchestra and is proficient in Persian and French. Long-term, Alexa is driven to improve women's health outcomes through rights advocacy and reform and will study Gender, Globalisation, and Rights at the University of Galway.

Neelesh Mupparapu, a resident of Reisterstown, Maryland, is a recent graduate from the University of Maryland, College Park, where he studied Biomedical Engineering. Neel is a Banneker/Key Scholarship recipient interested in pursuing medicine with an emphasis on equity and social advocacy. Through Gemstone, Neel and his team conducted a research thesis on utilizing deep learning and artificial intelligence to improve clinician diagnosis of mental disorders, and bioethics research to discern racial inequities, for which they won the outstanding thesis award. He is currently pursuing a post-baccalaureate program at NIH/NIA to extend his Bioengineering undergraduate honors thesis focused on investigating the phenotypes and molecular mechanisms of cardiovascular aging in HGPS patients. This research, along with his personal experiences, fueled his interest in studying neglected, rare disorders as well as cardiovascular disease. Neel won multiple awards for his work developing low-cost medical devices, including a neonatal glucose fiber-optic biosensor, which he presented at the Intel-Regeneron International Fair. He volunteers at the Esperanza Clinical Center, which provides free healthcare to Hispanic and underserved communities in Baltimore, and the Johns Hopkins Senior Citizen Department. As VP of Professional Affairs in the Biomedical Engineering Society, he coordinated departmental social networking, professional development, and service events. Neel is also a co-founder of the Brain Exercise initiative chapter at UMD and organized a volunteer program with Maryland Senior Citizen Homes. He is an Eagle Scout, and on weekends serves as an automotive mechanic at his local repair shop. Neel will study for MPH at University College Cork.

Zoha Siddiqui, a resident of McLean, Virginia, is a senior at William & Mary, where she studies International Relations and Transitional Justice, the process by which states redress mass violence. She became interested in the 1947 partition between India and Pakistan and how witnesses to partition, including her own grandparents and great grandparents, dealt with the grief, trauma, and tumult of that time. She is interested in the Good Friday Agreement, which succeeded in ending decades of sectarian violence, but left questions of criminal justice for human rights violations committed during the Troubles unaddressed. As Co-Director of the Exodus Project, Zoha studied challenges faced by vulnerable groups in displacement crises. Her work resulted in policy recommendations presented to USAID and other organizations to improve the quality of life for Venezuelan migrant communities in Colombia. She is also the Co-Founder and Co-Director of HER, a non-profit organization, that has led to the creation of 13 libraries for over 20,000 students attending underfunded girls' schools in rural and urban areas of Pakistan and Morocco. Zoha has co-authored several articles, including for *Foreign Policy*, on the role of international justice institutions in the ongoing war in Ukraine. She has also been involved in education rights for prisoners in Argentina and has analyzed and indexed evidence in legal

cases on enforced disappearances during Guatemala's Internal Armed Conflict. Zoha's aspiration is to become an international lawyer, to advance victims' rights through courts and law. Zoha will study Conflict Transformation and Social Justice at Queen's University Belfast.

Zachary Yahn, a resident of Roswell, Georgia, is a senior at the University of Virginia, where he studies Computer Science and Computer Engineering. Zach is the recipient of the esteemed Jefferson Scholarship, a nationally competitive merit-based scholarship. His interest is in artificial intelligence and commercializing the technology in an equitable and safe manner to address society's challenges. At NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, Zach worked to create an algorithm that could accurately identify clouds in archived images of one of Saturn's moons (Titan) from NASA's Cassini mission, and will soon publish his results in multiple peer-reviewed journals. Zach took first place in a national iDISPLA Adversarial AI/ML Competition, with an idea for preventing deepfake-based misinformation with blockchain technology. He wrote, designed, and delivered an undergraduate course, on the history of game-playing AI and its implications for the future. Chosen as a NSF REU Fellow in the Humans and Autonomy Lab at Duke University, Zach developed a classification and regression tree for predicting injuries in U.S. Navy aircraft carriers, and researched safety and self-driving cars. With the UVA ShiftLab, he explored applications of sparse compute-efficient multi-SLAM algorithms to swarms of palm-sized quadcopter drones. He was also Captain of the Club Water Polo team, and President of UVA's chapter of the IEEE-HKN electrical and computer engineering honor society. As a member of Forge, Zach assisted local non-profits with data science projects as part of the impact team. Zach will study Computer Science (Negotiated Learning) at University College Dublin.