

USC boasts two Rhodes Scholars this year

Dornsife alumnus: Oscar De Los Santos

The 2015 USC graduate is among 32 Americans to be honored with a prestigious scholarship to the University of Oxford

Oscar De Los Santos, a 2015 USC graduate in political science, is among 32 Americans announced as Rhodes Scholars.

Rhodes Scholarships are “the oldest and best known award for international study, and arguably the most famous academic award available to American college graduates,” said Elliot F. Gerson, American secretary of the Rhodes Trust, in the Nov. 19 announcement. The scholarships provide all expenses for two or three years of study at the University of Oxford in England and may allow funding in some instances for four years.

Highest honor

The son of Mexican immigrants, De Los Santos graduated from the USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences as a Truman Scholar, Phi Beta Kappa, with USC’s Order of the Laurel and Palm, the university’s highest honor for graduating undergraduates. The Los Angeles City Council honored him as an emerging leader.

At Oxford, he plans to read for a Master of Public Policy and a Master of Studies in theology with a focus on Christian ethics.

“I’m the child of Mexican immigrants, an anti-hunger advocate and a former teacher and political organizer. My degree choices are a way for me to respond from a sense of moral urgency to help marginalized people,” he wrote in an email to The Associated Press. De Los Santos said his parents “were undocumented immigrants when they came



USC alum Oscar De Los Santos will study at Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar next year.
Photo courtesy of Oscar De Los Santos

to this country, but they’re citizens now.”

De Los Santos has served as an intern to the National Economic Council and the House of Representatives, and worked as the youngest Florida field organizer for the 2012 campaign of President Barack Obama. In the 2015-16 academic year, he taught English and social studies to sixth graders at the Champion South Mountain School in Phoenix.

Today, he works as a lobbyist and manager of public policy for the Association of Arizona Food Banks.

Becoming a Rhodes Scholar

Rhodes Scholars are chosen in a two-stage process. First, applicants must be endorsed by their college or university.

This year about 2,500 students sought their institution’s endorsement; 882 were endorsed by 311 different colleges and universities. Committees of Selection in each of 16 U.S. districts then invite the strongest applicants to appear before them for interview.

The 32 Rhodes Scholars chosen from the United States will join an international group of scholars chosen from 18 other jurisdictions around the world.

Ninety-five scholars will be selected worldwide this year, usually including several who have attended American colleges and universities but who are not U.S. citizens and who have applied through their home country.

With the elections announced today, 3,420 Americans have won Rhodes Scholarships, representing 318 colleges and universities.



President Obama dines with Oscar De Los Santos near the White House. *Photo courtesy of Oscar De Los Santos*

Viterbi alumnus: Jung Kian Ng

The Malaysian will attend Oxford this fall, hoping to create change through effective public policy in his country

By Joanna Clay

USC alumnus Jung Kian Ng will leave his job as a speechwriter for Malaysian government officials for a good reason: to attend Oxford this fall. He's one of 96 Rhodes Scholars chosen in this year's class, and one of only two from Malaysia.

Established in 1902, the Rhodes Scholar program allows young people from 18 international jurisdictions to pursue two to three years of study at Oxford University. To be accepted, the scholars must show "outstanding intellect, character, leadership and commitment to service," according to the program's website.

Ng found out about the Rhodes Scholar program while studying at USC when he saw a newspaper clipping about it on a campus bulletin board. He graduated in 2014 with a B.S. in mechanical engineering and did a progressive degree, earning a master's degree in the subject by the time he graduated.

Through the Rhodes program, he'll put two more graduate degrees under his belt — pursuing a master of science in environmental change and management and a Master of Public Policy.

Serving Malaysians

His time at the USC Viterbi School of Engineering inspired him to learn more about how human actions affect the environment and to do more to help others. He wants to take his knowledge back to his home country, creating change through effective public policy.

"I hope to come back and better serve



Jung Kian Ng is one of 96 Rhodes Scholars chosen from around the world. *Photo by Nadila Nordin*

the Malaysian people," he said. "I'm passionate about the social and political developments in Malaysia as well as global climate change."

Beyond the environment, he's passionate about race relations, wealth distributions and human rights.

At just 25 years old, he's already attained quite a bit of government experience. He's currently special assistant to the minister of the economic planning unit, tasked with policy research, media strategy and speechwriting for the department's minister.

Besides that, he also started a nonprofit to encourage more Malaysian youth to study at universities in the United States. It's called USAPPS, which stands for U.S. applications, and mentors students through the application process. It has the backing of the U.S. Embassy there and 180 volunteers who attended school in the U.S.

Ng said he feels a "sense of gratitude for

a federal government scholarship, which paid for a U.S. college education that my single-parent family could never afford. I felt my time in the United States changed me tremendously as a person. . . . Therefore I would like to encourage more Malaysians to study there."

Humble beginnings

Ng grew up in Alor Setar, a town in the rice-producing region of Northern Malaysia. He and his sister were raised by his single mother, who earned the equivalent of \$700 a month working at his elementary school, he said.

"It might seem very little by U.S. standards, but since I lived in a small town, that amount was enough for my family of three, including my sister," he said. "However, it was definitely not enough for either of my mom's children to go to university. My one month of rent at USC was already close to \$700."

His sister also received a scholarship and is pursuing a doctorate in chemical engineering.

Ng said he's excited to join a talented cohort and eventually join an alumni network of Rhodes Scholars that includes former President Bill Clinton and Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal.

"The Rhodes Scholarship program is about cultivating world leaders and more importantly, ethical leaders," he said. "It's also about fighting the world's fight. I have chosen my fight here in Malaysia . . . I hope it will equip me with practical and leadership skills to navigate my way through the challenges I will face in the future."