



**Elevation
Scholars**

Making College Dreams a Reality

2023-24 ANNUAL REPORT





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MISSION: We invest in high-need, high-achieving students who have demonstrated community impact, helping them to and through the nation's most competitive colleges and universities.

VISION: To be the premier community organization celebrated for college success among high-achieving, high-need students throughout Central Florida.

VALUES

- Leadership
- Service
- Discipline
- Kindness



**Elevation
Scholars**

Dear friends,

Last year, we celebrated a decade of Elevation Scholars and the incredible achievements of our students. Reflecting on this past year, we are filled with immense pride and gratitude for your continued support. Your generosity has empowered countless young minds and shaped students' futures throughout Central Florida.

The remarkable students we build relationships with are often the highest-performing in their classes and commonly face unique challenges hindering their pursuit of higher education at competitive institutions nationwide. Despite these obstacles, these students possess extraordinary talent and unwavering determination to succeed. They not only graduate at the top of their class but also go on to attend prestigious universities, where they continue to excel academically and make meaningful contributions to their campuses and communities. Their success stories demonstrate the transformative power of education and the impact of a strong support system.

This year also marks a transition in leadership as we pass the torch from Scott Lee to Aminah Harris. This is not just a shift in roles but a testament to the strength of our shared vision and the foundation we have built together. Under our joint leadership, we have worked tirelessly to expand opportunities for students, strengthen our programming, and deepen our impact. As we move forward, Aminah will continue to lead Elevation Scholars with the same dedication and passion that has defined our mission from the beginning.

Our unwavering commitment remains: to build meaningful, long-lasting connections with these high-achieving students, introduce them to diverse career paths, and offer guidance as they pursue their dreams. The results of our collective efforts are not only inspiring but life-changing. With your continued support, we will expand our reach, provide even greater opportunities, and ensure that every student we serve has the resources and encouragement they need to realize their full potential.

As you read this year's report, we hope you'll be inspired by the extraordinary individuals we've had the privilege to guide. The future is bright, and together, we will continue to transform lives through education.

With gratitude,

Steve Orosz
BOARD CHAIR

Aminah Harris
PRESIDENT

COLLEGE SUCCESS AND PERSISTENCE

Program Scope

- Seven partner high schools
Edgewater | Evans | Colonial | Jones | Oak Ridge | Wekiva | Winter Springs
- **173** served in high school programming through group coaching
- **18** Scholars currently being coached through college admissions as high school seniors
- **75** Elevation Scholars currently attending college
- **23** college graduates
- **52** alumni

Program Impact

- College graduation rate: **100%**
- Over **\$4.34 million in scholarships** and financial aid secured
- Average College Award: **\$336,781**

Our Students

- High School Weighted GPA: **4.6**
- Median household Income: **\$41,764.50**
- First-generation college students: **64%**
- **84%** campus involvement, **75%** leadership roles
- Average College GPA: **3.3**



The Local Economy

- **68%** of Elevation Scholars alumni who have entered the workforce are contributing to the Central Florida economy.



We are proud of the caliber of colleges and universities our Scholars earn acceptance to each year. In our most recent class, **89%** of our Scholars were accepted into a **Top 30 institution** as rated by *U.S. News & World Reports*.

THE ELEVATION SCHOLARS JOURNEY

What does it mean to be an Elevation Scholar? Explore the Elevation Scholars Award process and our five-year commitment to walk alongside our students. We strive to enhance college access and ensure the completion of a college degree from the nation's most competitive colleges and universities.

High School Junior

- Apply for the **Elevation Scholars Award** – a five-year commitment valued at \$25,000. Funds are used for college admissions coaching and four years of wraparound support while students are in college.
- Participate in **Interview Day**, where the Scholars team will interview students, their parents, and teachers for acceptance into the program.
- Celebrate acceptance as an Elevation Scholar at our annual **Award Celebration**.

High School Seniors

- Begin college admissions coaching.
- Attend **Horizon Events**, where students are exposed to various career opportunities.
- Scholars announce their schools – **Decision Day**



Our Alumni

- Begin careers or pursue advanced degrees.
- Join our Alumni Association. This year, we celebrated our inaugural **Alumni Pinning Ceremony**, honoring 52 college graduates.

College Students

- Check in with College Success coaches to navigate the college environment and maximize their campus resources.
- Receive customized monthly financial support for items like airfare for school breaks, winter clothes, stipends, and other academic needs. This also includes **dorm kits and care packages**.
- Participate in job shadowing, paid internships, professional mentoring, and other career development offerings.



Scan here for a video playlist highlighting the Elevation Scholars Journey.



SCHOLAR SPOTLIGHT

Abigail

Winter Springs High School,
Florida State University

When Abi was 10 years old, her family settled in Broward County, Florida, after moving to the United States from Ecuador. In addition to navigating a new school and country, she also had to navigate learning English during her middle school years. While these challenges were difficult, Abi still thrived academically and socially.

The move from Broward County to Winter Springs, Florida, was a significant chapter in Abi's life. Starting a new high school brought new opportunities and experiences. Abi's academic excellence and involvement in extracurricular activities made her a standout student. She excelled in AP classes and was an active member of several honor societies. These achievements reflect her hard work and the support she received from her guidance counselor, who encouraged her to apply for the Elevation Scholars program.

Her involvement with Elevation Scholars was a turning point in her life. Elevation Scholars connected her with tutors who helped her prepare for the SAT and introduced her to various universities, including Florida State University, which she hadn't considered initially. Through Elevation Scholars, Abi was provided with the resources she needed to qualify for the Bright Futures scholarship, further enhancing her college prospects and opening the door to more opportunities.

As a student at Florida State University, Abi studied finance and French, eventually

"I always knew I wanted to continue my education, but before joining Elevation Scholars, I didn't realize how many options I had or where to start," says Abi. "Having guidance in navigating the next chapter of my life has given me the confidence to pursue the opportunities available to me."

developing an interest in global affairs. While in college, she continued receiving mentorship from Elevation Scholars, ultimately leading her to study abroad in Paris and Martinique. The cultural experiences Abi gained during her studies overseas shaped her career aspirations and led her to focus on finance and international business.

Abi currently works as a research operation associate at Mariner, where she aims to expand her knowledge in finance and hopes to work internationally in the future. She also serves as an executive board member for the Elevation Scholars Alumni Association. Throughout her journey, Abi credits Elevation Scholars with opening her eyes to various college opportunities and providing the support she needed to succeed. The encouragement she received gave her the push she needed to pursue her passions and achieve her goals.

Athanel

Evans High School,
Wake Forest University



“Without Elevation Scholars, I would still be on a path, but I would have missed out on the valuable experiences I’ve had so far, shares Athanel. He adds that the Elevation Scholars team is a “family that’s not blood.”

Despite these obstacles, Athanel stayed committed to his grades, adapting as best he could, like many students worldwide.

Initially skeptical about the value of college, especially after seeing his mother's struggles with student debt, Athanel's perspective began to shift thanks to the Elevation Scholars program. He received guidance, resources, and opportunities that broadened his horizons. College tours, leadership programs, and a fully funded Ivy League college tour were pivotal in shifting his view on higher education and the opportunities it could foster.

Athanel's story highlights the profound impact of educational and personal development. Now, he is a college student on a full scholarship at Wake Forest University, where he plans to attend law school. He is particularly passionate about advocacy and social justice and aims to represent clients effectively while navigating the complexities of the legal system.

When Athanel transferred to Evans High School in the ninth grade, it was all about his passion for basketball. He had high hopes of landing a spot on the varsity team but found himself on the junior varsity team instead. While this setback was disappointing then, Athanel didn't let it hold him back from excelling in other areas. He threw himself into extracurriculars like cross country and track while maintaining strong academic performance.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic turned everything upside down, disrupting his eighth and ninth-grade years. The sudden shift to virtual learning presented unique challenges.



Evon Thompson

Evans High School Class of 2020
Harvard University Class of 2024
B.S. Health and Exercise Science
FUTURE PLANS: Master of Public Health at the University of Cambridge, London



Omar Martinez

Colonial High School Class of 2020
Stanford University Class of 2024
B.S Product Design Engineering
FUTURE PLANS: Quality Engineer at CaptiveAire

Rucha Patel

Winter Springs High School Class of 2020
University of Florida Class 2024
**Cum Laude graduate*
B.S. Microbiology and Cell Science Minor Pathogenesis
FUTURE PLANS: Gap year in India - completing research and preparing for medical school

Vanessa Julien

Jones High School Class of 2020
Florida State University Class of 2024
Double Major - Bachelors of Science in Fiance and Professional Sales
FUTURE PLANS: Marriott Management Program - Marriott's Voyage Program

Minh Do

Oak Ridge High School Class of 2020 | Wake Forest Class of 2024 | Bachelor of Science in Chemistry
FUTURE PLANS: College Advising Corps & Master at Boston University

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHTS



High School Programming

In addition to our awards program, we offer a range of after-school and in-school activities designed to foster a college-going culture at our partner high schools, helping students navigate the college admissions process through resume-building, community service, and college application support sessions. We also provide group coaching through our Lion's Den after-school program, which supports rising seniors who were not selected for the award but still wish to pursue competitive colleges, offering them a structured college admissions coaching curriculum in a group setting. This year, we celebrated our first QuestBridge Scholar, a participant in our Lion's Den.



Annual Awards Celebration

During our Annual Awards Celebration, we celebrate students who earned a Scholars Award and spotlight where they are on their journey. Highlights from the event:

CLASS 6 – COLLEGE GRADUATES

Graduates from several notable colleges and universities, including Harvard, Stanford, Brandeis, Vanderbilt, the University of Florida, and Babson College.

CLASS 10 – HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS

The largest Wake Forest University cohort, with eight out of 18 attending the university; first-time acceptances to Brown University and Elon University; additional acceptances to Vanderbilt and Emory Universities.

CLASS 11 – HIGH SCHOOL JUNIORS

This year, we welcomed our largest cohort in six years, with 24 new students as Elevation Scholars!



2024 Horizon Events

Every summer, our Scholars have the opportunity to immerse themselves in various professional industries, thanks to our corporate sponsors and community partners. These annual "Horizon Events" are meant to spark curiosity in our Scholars and provide a welcoming, professional environment for them to explore their interests.



COMMUNITY LEADERS EMPOWER SCHOLARS THROUGH HORIZON EVENTS

Thanks to our corporate sponsors and community partners, our Scholars have the opportunity to immerse themselves in various professional industries every summer. These annual "Horizon Events" are meant to spark curiosity in our Scholars and provide a welcoming, professional environment for them to explore their interests.

Thank you to Our 2024 Horizon hosts for pouring into our Scholars:

- African-American Chamber of Commerce
- Chris King, Founder of Elevation Scholars and Elevation Financial Group
- Dreams Geometry Media
- Finrock
- Foundry Commercial
- Grace Medical Home
- Jarel Communications
- Lockheed Martin
- Lowndes Law
- NBC Sports Next/Telemundo
- Orlando Health
- UCF College of Medicine
- Smartwealth
- Viable Solutions



4
Career Tracks
liberal arts, business,
healthcare, and computer
science and engineering

13
Community Partners



100%
Scholar Participants



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Phil Henry, MPA, CAP, RICP

Financial Planner/Partner | SmartWealth

"I was blown away," Phil recalls. "Seeing the graduating seniors and meeting the new class was a win. I knew I wanted to get involved right after the event ended." event ended."



Phil Henry's journey with Elevation Scholars began in 2021 when he attended a graduation event at the invitation of his business partner and mentor, Randy Ellington. What started as an invitation to witness a powerful moment in the lives of scholars quickly became a personal mission.

Phil's commitment to service is rooted in his personal experiences and professional philosophy. His personal story exemplifies the mission of our program and the generational impact that access to higher education can have on a family.

Although a driven student, Phil reflects that having access to a program like Elevation Scholars would have been transformative for him as a youth. It wasn't until a mentor encouraged him during high school that his academic journey turned, ultimately leading him to graduate alongside his mother from the University of Central Florida – on the same day!

At Elevation Scholars, Phil's impact is deeply felt. From helping scholars navigate networking events to encouraging them to pursue higher education, his dedication is unwavering. "I see the impact of helping high-achieving students gain access to higher education," he says. "I didn't have that growing up, so I know how much it means. To me, giving encouragement is just as impactful as giving financially."

One of Phil's most memorable moments with an Elevation Scholar occurred during a Horizon networking event he hosted through his wealth management firm, Smart Wealth. He intentionally designed the event to simulate real-world networking scenarios, complete

with an element of chaos, to prepare students for similar challenges they might face in their professional lives. Initially, one young woman struggled with the environment, and Phil was concerned the experience might overwhelm her. However, by the end of the event, she approached Phil to share how valuable the experience was.

"The scholar came up to me at the end and said, 'Even though it was challenging, and I felt overwhelmed at first, this was exactly what I needed. It gave me a real taste of the world I'm stepping into and helped me understand how to navigate uncomfortable situations.' That moment reassured me and reinforced why I do this. It showed me how important it is to give these scholars meaningful, practical opportunities to grow and succeed."

Starting his career in the financial services industry in 2007 as a mutual fund trader for the Bank of New York, Phil joined the SmartWealth team in 2013. His qualifications include being a Chartered Advisor in Philanthropy (CAP) and a Retirement Income Certified Professional (RICP). The CAP designation equips advisors with the knowledge to help clients articulate and advance their highest aspirations for self, family, and society. The RICP credential empowers professionals to guide clients through accumulating and managing assets

for retirement, providing them with actionable strategies to maintain financial security throughout their retirement years.

When he's not helping individuals and organizations position themselves for financial success, Phil serves through community involvement. In addition to serving with Elevation Scholars, he is the Board Chair and Capital Campaign Chair for IDignity, which helps individuals in need secure essential identification documents. He is also the Board Chair for Crave, an organization committed to fostering community connections. He also serves on the Advisory Committee for the UCF College of Community Innovation and Education.

Phil's history of service extends to earlier roles, including board positions with Aloha Environmental/Holistic Environmental Stewardship Foundation, United Latinos of America, and United Missionary Outreach. Additionally, he has been a passionate volunteer for Give Kids the World, supporting children with critical illnesses and their families.

When he's not busy with his clients or community service, Phil enjoys cheering on all UCF Knights athletics.

Phil's hope for Elevation Scholars is clear: to see the students become future leaders who impact their communities. He's already seen this happen, supporting scholars who have gone on to advanced degrees and impactful careers.

Thank you, Phil, for inspiring us all with your generosity and commitment to building brighter futures.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Corporate Partners



Foundation Partners



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Desiree Allison		

Education Partners



FINANCIALS

INCOME

6/30/2024 YTD

Corporate Giving	\$ 392,815
Foundation Grants	\$ 941,665
Events Income	\$ 70,984
Individual Giving	\$ 269,586
Total Income	\$ 1,675,050

EXPENSE

Scholars	
Scholars Staff	\$ 488,983
High School Programs	\$ 18,394
High School Scholars	\$ 45,961
College Scholars	\$ 293,005
Marketing	\$ 50,379
Training, Travel & Consulting	\$ 32,075
Alumni Programs	\$ 1,788
Community Engagement Events	\$ 60,014
Total · Scholars	\$ 990,599
Non-Program	
Administration Staff	\$ 261,167
Accounting & Professional Fees	\$ 68,523
Facility & Facility Misc.	\$ 39,533
Fundraising, Evaluation, and Other	\$ 79,050
Total · Non-Scholars	\$ 448,273

Total Expense \$ 1,438,872

Net Income \$ (236,178)



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