

You Are Notable

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SPEAKERS

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Sophia Tsai 00:00

Hello and welcome to Triton Tools and Tidbits. My name is Sophia Tsai and I will be your host for today's episode. Today we will be discussing prestigious scholarships that undergraduate students and recent grads may consider applying to. We'll explore some of the key elements to these nationally competitive scholarships, highlighting international experiences, as well as post-baccalaureate awards that we encourage students to apply to. Along the way, we'll touch on letters of recommendation, personal statements, choosing the right opportunity, and the best way to present yourself in order to stand out against the cream of the crop. Our guests today are Dr. David Artis, Dean of Undergraduate Research Investments, and Director of Academic Enrichment Programs, and Dora Ogbonna, a third-year chemical engineering student from Warren college who recently won the Goldwater Scholarship.

Sophia Tsai 00:51

As one of the campus nominators for a number of these prestigious scholarships, Dr. Artis has had multiple years of experience in guiding students through to winning these awards. He will be sharing with us some of his tips - and common pitfalls that students sometimes run into when applying to these awards. Dora will be telling us about her experiences applying to and winning the Goldwater Scholarship, and share a few tips for potential applicants. Hello, Dr. Artis and Dora, thank you for joining us. If you can talk to students and tell them more about why would they consider applying to one of these national competitive scholarships in the first place-

David Artis 01:23

Sure. I would say that students should really consider the kinds of challenges they want to give themselves to achieve as much of their professional and academic aspirations as possible. Through these kinds of awards, there will always be more opportunities to grow as the scholar, to grow as a professional. What you want to think about with some of these scholarships is what they will add to your skill set, and to your knowledge, and to the kind of perspective that you bring to your chosen field. I think that students sometimes think this will be the epitome of their careers. But it's really a tool - just like some of the other tools that students make use of when they're gaining experience - and really coming to confirm the idea that they have their vocation, or life's work, or their profession. These are

the kinds of opportunities to meet people who are already advanced enough faculty members who distinguish scholars at universities or institutions which are sometimes very far away, and sometimes very hard to get into. So, you really want a process to make yourself an attractive candidate for some of these awards. You also have the chance - if you're given one of these - to meet young people like yourself who are really excited about the kind of research that they can conduct, who are really just on fire to start working in an area that means something to them, in an area where they think it'll have an impact on society. So, you really want to do this because you have that kind of dedication, that determination. You want to go into this knowing that these awards very often are competitive. These awards are going to require a lot of focus, and preparation, and hard work. And even after you win the award - if you are lucky enough to win it - you're going to have to continue to be a dedicated student or a dedicated scholar.

Sophia Tsai 03:36

Do you mind telling us more about the scholarship that you won? I would imagine we're talking about the Goldwater here. But tell me more about what it is that you got through the national competitive scholarship.

Dora Ogbonna 03:48

So, the Goldwater Scholarship is given by, I believe, the Department of Defense - there's a branch underneath that. It's meant to be given to students who they believe will be making a change in society in terms of STEM and the future. Each scholar has the opportunity to receive \$7500. The actual amounts you see depends but that's for commutative purposes. But each scholar gets \$7500. You also get invited to different opportunities, as well, that are quite exclusive too - like Goldwater scholars. You get to meet different people who you wouldn't meet on a normal basis. But that's mostly it - I'm trying to think of what else is so exciting. I imagine that if things were in person, there's more things that would be happening - but because of the pandemic a lot of things are virtual.

Sophia Tsai 04:53

Yeah, definitely. That makes a lot of sense. I think you gave us a pretty good overview of the Goldwater Scholarship. I believe it is actually through the Barry Goldwater foundation. So, you mentioned some cool people that you've met, potentially. Who would you highlight, that has been - some people that you never thought you'd meet, but through this, you're getting a chance to?

Dora Ogbonna 05:17

Let's see... there have been many people.

Sophia Tsai 05:22

One or two, maybe.

Dora Ogbonna 05:24

There's someone called Matt - I can't remember his last name - but I believe he just graduated as a senior in grad school as well. And you look up their achievements and it's quite a lot. You can get quite daunted as well, but at the same time, I think it's inspiring. And it's not just them - through the program. Also, beneath, you interact with people who are currently in MD-PhD programs, which I hope to join in the future. It's nice interacting with them, see their perspective of stuff. Because we chat through Slack

there are channels for people who are applying to different things. I believe every month they have like a podcast - not podcast per se, but it's like a Twitch stream where people come and ask questions. There are questions from ranging from - the Rhodes Scholarship, to Marshall [Scholarship], to people who have done scholarships in UK, Island, and all the national scholarships - that are on the same level as the Goldwater. In addition, you also get to meet different people who were like Knight-Hennessy scholars or who currently are - because I believe the group core just graduated. People who are like Hennessy scholars, and they give feedback - the applications and stuff. And people who are applying to medical schools, this process is really insightful.

Sophia Tsai 07:02

Yes, I actually recall a student - many students, actually - that I've encountered through the years, who have told me this process has been such a gamechanger for them - to really just sit down and understand themselves. And I think that that has been a major takeaway for many students. Whether or not they actually get the award, that experience of thinking about who they are, what they want, and just taking a little bit of time to reflect, has been very helpful for them to understand what they want in life, and to articulate that into an application.

David Artis 07:38

I would just add, I think as much as sometimes you can be daunted by hearing a phrase like a Rhodes College or Fulbright, and think of how many other people are applying for it. Submitting an application is a great way to build your confidence. To find out that there are people professors here, or people who supervise you and are willing to say, yes, we believe you can do this, right? Anytime you apply for an award, you want a kind of confidence in yourself. Not an assumption that you'll get this because why wouldn't they give it to you. But just the idea that you are taking advantage of where you are right now, at UC San Diego, taking advantage of the opportunities. And there are people who are noticing that. And there are people who believe in you. Even if you don't get this particular award, putting together that team that's behind you is really a great thing for making yourself feel like you can take the next step. Whether it's with an award, whether it is going to graduate school, or to postbac [post-baccalaureate] year and doing something that's really a challenge to yourself. This is a great way to build the confidence to keep moving forward.

Sophia Tsai 08:50

So, what made you even want to consider applying for the Goldwater in the first place?

Dora Ogbonna 08:55

I think the first time I heard about it was actually my first year. So, during the summer, I had way too much time on my hands because - I mean, I was in the lab was doing lab work for someone research but the same time you get those long breaks in between current one experiment and another. And it's not sufficient time for you to focus on reading an actual paper. But it's just enough time for you to look through stuff. During that period of time, I took the time to flip through applications, what the application actually entails, and what the scholarship was about. At first, it was really daunting. I think even now, it is still daunting. If there was an application - a scholarship that asked me to do what I did again, it would still be a daunting task because that took me a very long while. But I think in the long run, there was a lot of things I learned by applying that I wouldn't have learned to either way, if that makes sense. I knew for example for the NSF GRFP [Graduate Research Fellowship Program] you have to write a paper -

not a paper, a research proposal. For the Goldwater, we also had to do that. And that was such a daunting task for me for my second year. There was a lot of things happening during that period of time, which was also why I felt like it was such a good experience as well. Like me getting into research and then writing a proposal or a summary of -

Sophia Tsai 10:28

Yeah, no, that's really great. To know that you you've learned a lot during the process. So that can be helpful for you, when you're considering other applications.

Sophia Tsai 10:39

For some students they may be early on in their career. They may say I'm not ready to - graduate school, I'm not ready to go abroad after I graduate, I want to think about awards I can apply to now as an undergraduate. So maybe we want to highlight a little bit more about the Goldwater or the Strauss awards?

David Artis 10:56

The Barry Goldwater award, named for former senator from Arizona, is a research award, you can apply for it as a second- or third-year student. Again, the definition juniors are one who's not graduating in the next academic year. So, you can be a fourth-year student who's not graduating and apply for this award. Has to be in the natural sciences, engineering, or mathematics - or a permanent resident. The award is \$7,500. There are - after that - no requirements or very few requirements.

Sophia Tsai 11:39

One of the great things about nominating - they recently expanded it to include five students from UCSD. The fifth one potentially being a transfer student.

David Artis 11:49

I should say economic core students, and if one of the applicants is a transfer student than our economic is five. Which is a very - gift. You mentioned the stress. I just want to say the stress - some very strong students, but unlike some of the ones who talked about, the emphasis here is on public service. There's another award you apply for a second- or third-year students. That award is very generous, it's \$15,000 for a student initiated public - these projects. And the local, national or international, there's no there's no real limit on what kinds of projects they can be as long as you can justify the public service aspect of it. We have a terrific winner a few years ago who did a project in neighborhood - in Sierra Leone, West Africa - community that did not have really reliable source of clean water. She used her award to create a sand filtration system, so that they can have clean drinking water - proposal and I read it, I knew that I was going to nominate it and I was so happy that she won. So, we've had those kinds of awards. We've also had awards that take place in San Diego. Another award winner had a project in Mexico. So, you can go near, you can go a little way away, you're a long way away. But you need a project that will have some - resolved.

David Artis 13:36

The Strauss Foundation - really want you to be an ethical student, but you really have to show the service aspect. The other thing it could be a project that will continue after the student graduates. We really want - so that they can see how the project will go on to benefit the community, even after the

student graduates. There are things to consider when putting - to create an organization with such a plan. What do they want to get into these reports and the community will have some part if you like. It's a great way for students to take something that is meaningful to them, because this is the student's idea. It's not a class assignment. It should not be part of a larger group class. It's the students desire to do something for public service. And we've had aside from those two, I mentioned some really great other ideas, kind of a living textbook that will be open to students in places that we couldn't get to physically - health care that's always very good. Students who want to work with homeless very popular or less a fortunate population. That is - you want to have an impact on some part - with the Strauss. If you think that you can't do this as an undergrad look at our Strauss winners.

Sophia Tsai 15:13

You mentioned that it just took you a long time. What would you recommend if someone else wanted to apply for Goldwater? How long should they plan out for this whole process?

Dora Ogbonna 15:23

Honestly, I would say, if you have a long time on your hands start now. I know it's due next month. But normally, I'll tell people start six months before you turn it in, so if you can start it over the summer. Start it doesn't necessarily mean start typing everything, but rather, gather your thoughts and ideas. That way, even if things are last minute, you've been thinking about it for a really long time. So, you know what you're actually talking about, rather than just pieced it together in one day. But I would say, no matter that amount of time, if you want to apply this cycle that is currently going on, definitely start now. If you want to apply for the next cycle, start now. There's literally no - I want to say no ideal time to start. I mean, don't start it the week before because you still have to get recommendation letters.

Sophia Tsai 16:26

You mentioned that for your essays, you have people critique it. Was there anyone in particular that you have them go over your essays or people that you would recommend to other students that are applying?

Dora Ogbonna 16:39

During the summer, I actually gave different presentations, from research presentations to lab presentations and meetings. I found that the critique given there was quite helpful and translated to what my actual paper was going to be. Because although it wasn't word for word was basically based on the research that I've been doing, and I've presented that same slide like 1000 times. So that goes through like the refinery process as well.

Sophia Tsai 17:09

Yeah, no, that definitely makes sense. Earlier, you mentioned the letters of recommendation, how did you go about asking people to write them for you? And what kind of people did you ask?

Dora Ogbonna 17:22

That's a good question. When I was actually reading on the website, they have recommendation for who should write your recommendation letters. Sometimes they have this thing where they're like, you need to have two PI's write your letter for you. And I've only had one, that became a problem. But it was easily solved, I guess. How I started was I started with a baseline of the people who I knew I wanted

them to write letters for me, either because they knew me personally, or/and they have worked with me personally, so they know like my work ethic. In addition, they know what I want to do. It's not just someone that - it's not just a teacher. I mean, one of them was a teacher who I had a class with. But at the same time, I've also been meeting with them after class, so they knew who I was outside of classes, if that makes sense. But I started with this, the list of teachers who I knew what I want. If there were a selection, there would be the people and then I choose three people out of that. Then when I was talking to Dr. Artists, I gave him the names of the three people. He was like, that sounds good, that sounds great.

Dora Ogbonna 18:55

I'll say recommendations, definitely read what is given on the website because it's written by the people who are going to be creating application either way. I looked online for resources outside of UCSD, resources in other schools and how they approached the Goldwater. Because I believe some schools have an AP sort situation going on in their school as well. If you have explored what there is to explore here, definitely go outside the bracket and look at those. Look at their recommendation letters - what they believe a recommender should write and things like that. And definitely, I cannot stress this enough - make sure you start early, if you can start - and I'd say that's the caveat of starting now is that you don't have enough time before, I believe the 21st, to turn in everything. But for the recommenders you definitely have to start early. Before anything, that's the first step. For me, once I guaranteed that I had a recommender, then I bothered with the rest of the application because I didn't want to finish everything. And then it turns out that the most important piece of my application was missing. So, definitely start with the recommender.

Sophia Tsai 20:26

I do want to mention that Dr. Artist is not our only campus representative that we have. We do have a few others that couldn't be with us today. But I wanted to mention them in case you are interested in some of the awards that they highlight. If you're interested in the international scholarships, many of them like the Boren and the Gilman, the Critical Language Scholarship, you want to reach out to Miss Kim Burton in the Study Abroad office. If you're looking for the Fulbright award, or looking more into NSF Graduate Research Fellowship Program, NSF GRFP, you want to talk to Michelle Monroy. She can also tell you a little bit more about the Ford Fellowship. If you're looking for the Rhodes Scholarship, the Truman Scholarship or the Udall you'll want to reach out to Dr. Ross Frank.

Sophia Tsai 21:16

So, these people and others are going to be your support team. If you're interested in some of these, first thing, check out our website, the National competitive scholarships, NCS.ucsd.edu and you can learn much more about these. If you are actually interested in applying come meet me, Sofia Tsai, Dr. Sophia Tsai. I would love to meet you because I think sitting down together and just exploring the world about these different scholarships. What you want to do is put yourself in the best lights. We can talk about that any time. I think that that's really a great first step for you. I do highly recommend you come talk to me, you can talk to any of the campus representatives. Thank you for experiencing our podcasts on prestigious scholarships, and I am Sophia Tsai. I hope you all have a great week and we will see you back next week on Triton Tools and Tidbits.