

3 Things Every Scholarship Applicant Should Know

As a scholarship recipient who's currently serving my bond, I've spent a lot of time thinking about the right attitude you should have as a scholarship applicant.

Taking up a scholarship has been a huge blessing to me in many ways, but the scholarship path isn't for everyone. As such, students ought to go into the application process with their eyes wide open.

Taking up a scholarship is a weighty decision that will impact your life for many years to come. It's one choice that you definitely shouldn't make in haste.

Receiving a scholarship shouldn't mainly be about the prestige or the free education — even though these factors are definitely part of the scholarship package.

Instead, the scholarship decision should revolve around whether or not you're a good fit for your future job — and the organisation too — once you graduate from university. This isn't something that's easy to figure out when you're just 18 or 19 years old, which makes the scholarship decision an even harder one.

Here, I'll let you in on three things that I believe every scholarship applicant should know.

These tips will put you in the right frame of mind as you consider what the best decision is for you, which may or may not involve taking up a scholarship.

1. YOU'LL HAVE TO MAKE SACRIFICES IF YOU TAKE UP A SCHOLARSHIP.

If you're on a scholarship, you'll be concerned about your academic performance. Not just because you've done well in school so far, but also because your scholarship board will expect you to achieve consistently excellent academic results.



Should you take a fascinating class with a professor who's notorious for giving grades no higher than a "B"? Or should you take a class that you have zero interest in, but that promises an easy "A"?

These are the kinds of dilemmas you'll face. These dilemmas could influence the quality of the education you receive, because you might be more concerned about grades than about learning.

When your undergraduate days are over — depending on how engaged you choose to be both inside and outside the classroom — you'll leave with a university degree, but will you have received a university education?

There's a huge difference between the two.

If you choose to study in the US, and want to graduate in three years, you'll need to decide on your major early on. You'll also have to take extra classes each semester, and you'll probably need to do summer school as well.

All this means that it'll be hard — not impossible, but still hard — to be extremely involved in activities outside the classroom.

These are just a few of the sacrifices that all scholarship recipients will face some time in their academic journey.

2. TAKING UP A SCHOLARSHIP WILL AFFECT YOU FAR BEYOND YOUR BOND PERIOD.

By the time you're done serving your bond, you'll be in your late 20s or early 30s. You might be married, and you might even have started a family.

I know, at this stage in your life, getting married and having kids sound far-fetched and seem like things that will happen a lot further down the road.

But take it from me, it's not that far down the road!

In your late 20s and early 30s, you'll be very concerned about your personal finances. You might have housing and car loans to pay off, and you might need to support not only your future children but perhaps your parents financially, too.

If, after you've completed your bond, you want to take a risk by venturing into a different industry, starting your own business or becoming a freelancer, I guarantee that you'll think twice. You might feel like you have too many responsibilities and obligations to make a drastic change in your life.

I personally know of people who continue to have this mindset for the rest of their career!

Hence, having a bond to serve could have a big impact on the way you make decisions down the line.

3. GETTING A SCHOLARSHIP IS EASY COMPARED TO ASKING YOURSELF THE TRULY IMPORTANT QUESTIONS.

Potential scholarship applicants often ask, "Is it a good idea to take up a scholarship?"

This question implicitly assumes that it's the same answer for everyone.

This really isn't the case, however, because the most important part of the equation is you. What are your aspirations, strengths and shortcomings? What's your risk tolerance like? What do you want your career to count for, when it's all said and done?

Do you want your career to be about embracing a sense of adventure, or building a more cohesive society, or mentoring young leaders, or empowering the disadvantaged?

You'll have to go through an intentional and intensive process of self-discovery before you understand who you are.

This process is essential, because you need to know who you are before you decide what to do.

Putting the "being" before the "doing" is crucial if you want to find long-term fulfillment, whether or not you're a scholarship recipient.

IN CLOSING ...

Let me leave you with this wise saying:

"Don't let what you want now prevent you from getting what you want most."

This isn't to say that a scholarship will prevent you from getting what you want most. But it's easy to let what you want now — the financial support, the prestige, a secure job, the bragging rights — cloud your judgment.

What do you want most? A career that's full of challenge? A business that you can call your own? A job that's in line with your core values?

How does a scholarship fit into the picture?

If you choose to take up a scholarship, you ought to be fully aware that it will open certain doors for you, but that there will also be consequences you hadn't foreseen.

But that's life. Choices come with consequences, so take complete responsibility for your decisions. Whatever the outcome, you should accept that you have made the decision and that you are fully responsible for your life.

No excuses. No complaints. No regrets.

I wish you great wisdom in this crucial decision.▲



About the author

Daniel Wong is an overseas scholarship recipient who is currently serving his bond. He works as a project engineer. Daniel graduated summa cum laude from Duke University in 2011 with a double major in Mechanical Engineering and Economics. He is the author of *The Happy Student: 5 Steps to Academic Fulfillment and Success*, and co-author of the e-book, *Singapore Scholarship Guide: The \$500,000 Decision* (www.SingaporeScholarshipGuide.com). Daniel blogs regularly at www.Daniel-Wong.com and offers scholarship advising services to potential scholarship applicants.