



2021 ANNUAL STUDENT SCHOLARSHIP WINNING ESSAYS

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ESSAY TOPICS:

TOPIC #1: THE VISION OF NFWL IS TO EMPOWER AND INSPIRE ELECTED WOMEN TO BECOME THOUGHT LEADERS WHO SHAPE AMERICA'S FUTURE. WRITE A SHORT ESSAY THAT DESCRIBES AREAS IN YOUR LIFE WHERE YOU DEMONSTRATED LEADERSHIP, OVERCAME OBSTACLES, OR EMPOWERED AND INSPIRED A WOMAN IN YOUR LIFE EITHER THROUGH YOUR SCHOOL, SOCIAL, OR FAMILY LIFE.

TOPIC #2: GIVE A SPECIFIC EXAMPLE OF A TIME SINCE YOU HAVE BEEN A STUDENT THAT YOU CREATED AND SUSTAINED A MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIP(S) AND HOW THAT INVOLVEMENT AND/OR OTHER LEADERSHIP QUALITIES MADE A DIFFERENCE FOR AN ORGANIZATION, ACTIVITY, AND/OR COMMUNITY IN WHICH YOU WERE INVOLVED.



LAURA BOWERS

UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE

Leaders come and go, but their position and their impact are everlasting. Senators come and go, Representatives come and go, and the Vice President of Membership Recruitment for the University of Tennessee's Alpha Omicron Pi chapter comes and goes. Because such elected positions will inevitably turn over to the next leader, it is up to the current leader to utilize their term to the fullest, implement positive and lasting change, and set the tone for the next leader filling their seat. For the past year, I have had the pleasure of serving as the Vice President of Membership Recruitment, otherwise known as VPMR, for the University of Tennessee's Alpha Omicron Pi chapter. My positive changes and impact made with recruitment were entirely dependent on creating and sustaining meaningful relationships with the women of AOII after one-and-a-half years of living virtually.

Sorority recruitment is an emotionally, mentally, and physically demanding two weeks. My priorities as VPMR were to create an environment in which all 286 members of AOII understood what was happening, felt comfortable asking questions of leadership, and felt that their role in recruitment was valued. Early on, I recognized that these priorities would fall into place once our chapter's internal support system was rebuilt after three semesters of COVID-19 virtual events. Ultimately, I knew I needed to guide the women in my chapter toward creating purposeful relationships with one another, for the sake of recruitment, the future of AOII, and their well-being.

With this in mind, and with the knowledge that people are united when they have a common goal to work toward, I spent the entirety of the Spring 2021 semester educating the chapter on the importance of recruitment. I had a "Recruitment Tip of the Week" each Monday during our chapter meeting, which I created the content for from scratch. I started with the foundational lessons: our founders' original intentions for AOII and their desires for chapter growth. I built on those lessons as the semester progressed, slowly igniting passion and desire to have a successful recruitment come August. By the end of the Spring semester and my Recruitment Tip of the Week lessons, the 286 women of AOII understood that they were united in this common goal.

I spent the summer planning the logistics of recruitment alongside my team and checking in on my chapter members. My team and I were in constant communication with the chapter members, making sure they were receiving clear instructions, feeling valued, and were still united in excitement for August's recruitment. Once August arrived, I packed our recruitment prep week with educational information, bonding events for the whole chapter, and small group time to allow for the chapter members to get to know one another on a deeper level. It was through the recruitment leadership team's transparent communication, creation of time and space for bonding, and encouragement of chapter members that AOII had the most successful recruitment in recent years. Since recruitment has ended, our chapter has never been stronger and more united in our values. Chapter members feel empowered to hold leadership accountable, speak openly about ideas on how we can continue to grow, and love one another deeply.

Three semesters of being virtual did not break our sisterhood, and I am proud to have played a role in helping to rebuild it. My one year of leadership as VPMR is now over, but I know I have influenced years of VPMRs to come—as all elected leaders should do. I have shaped the future of AOII by creating positive changes through an emphasis on creating and sustaining meaningful relationships.



ALEXANDRA JOBE

MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

Ever since I was younger, I have always been taught to think outside the box. To think unconditionally, to be creative. I take pride in the ability to be open-minded and to be imaginative in my life and in my thinking. I was born with a defect called Absence of Tibia. About one in a million babies are diagnosed with this condition worldwide. When I was around 15 months old, my parents chose to amputate both of my legs above the knee.

As a little girl, I wanted to be anything and everything when I grew up. My mind was constantly changing from doctor, to teacher, to ice skater, to dancer, to someone who could change the world. I wanted to be absolutely anyone and inside the walls of my home I was. I would teach, and act, and dress up as a doctor and pretend to heal people, and dance around the living room because I never saw my disability as something to hold me back until the rest of the world told me to. When I left the walls of my home, I would end up leaving the girl that I wanted to be behind. The girl that I was. In society's eyes, people with disabilities are stereotyped as fragile, to achieve less, to be less. Growing up disabled has had its challenges. It's frustrating and overwhelming, but so many of the challenges that come from it don't come from being disabled on its own, but because society sees me as disabled. They see me as their version of disabled. The fragile version. The version who is lucky if she amounts to much. The version who they are waiting to fail, so the rest of the world can help pick up the pieces and post the video "person helps disabled girl" to the internet waiting for it to go viral. The version who's disability stops her from being whoever she wants to be.

In High School, I worked inside the box office at a movie theatre. I would have conversations with customers and the occasional offhand comment now and then, which was refreshing. One thing all of these people had in common was the look on their faces. It was a different look from what I was used to. It was a look of normalcy. Most people wouldn't notice the look, which is a privilege that's been foreign for long enough. It was a look that I cherished my entire seven hour shift, five days a week. I cherished this look because when I was treated normally, when I was treated like me, I felt like me.

And I cherished this look because when my shift ended, and I rolled myself out of the box, the look faded. People didn't mean to go back to looking at me with curious, but pitiful eyes, but they did. But their eyes were more open and accepting when I was inside my box than they ever were outside of it. I've learned to overcome my obstacles by overcoming societal expectations and stereotypes, not my disability in itself. My disability doesn't need overcoming, so instead I call out the barriers and the internalized ableism in the community and I am loud about it. I am overcoming the fragile and sorrowful stereotypes and showing society that I can be more, so others like me will realize it too. I show myself proudly so the young disabled community can see themselves and not feel alienated. Open mindedness doesn't always come with thinking outside of the box. I overcame mine by thinking inside the box.

EMILY SKIDMORE

EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY



Throughout my college career, I have been involved in The Wesley Foundation. The Wesley Foundation is a United Methodist campus ministry that provides opportunities for spiritual growth, making friends, leadership, service, and missions. Each week, the foundation has church service and dinner afterwards. When I first joined The Wesley Foundation, I was not very involved, but I soon realized that the students around me were strongly impacting my life and that I wanted to do the same for other students. During my second year at The Wesley Foundation, I joined The Wesley Foundation Leadership team as a church liaison. My role consisted of emailing those who may have not attended service the week before and writing thank you notes to fellow community members who had donated to the foundation. This role was very important to the foundation because it allowed us to keep in touch with fellow students as well as show our appreciation for our community.

My first two years at the foundation impacted both myself and my community by bringing us closer together, but I feel this current school year at the foundation is the best example of how I have sustained meaningful relationships and made a difference in my community. This year, I have been the Fundraising Intern for The Wesley Foundation. My role has been to write thank you notes to sponsors and help raise money for the foundation. I have helped raise money by traveling to one of the local United Methodist churches to tell them about the foundation. I went to the church and presented a slide show. It took strong leadership qualities and toughness to speak in front of the church's congregation. I also feel that going and presenting there made them see how thankful the foundation was for their support. In addition to going to one of the local churches, I have also written letters to possible donors to get them to consider donating to the foundation.

Furthermore, I have maintained meaningful relationships at The Wesley Foundation by going to the foundation each week for church service and dinner. Each week, I see fellow students and leadership team members, and I can ask them how their week has gone. I also make connections with them by asking them what they are hoping to get accomplished the following week. College life can be stressful, so it is an awesome opportunity to give those students around me a person that will just listen to them. The other students and I at The Wesley Foundation do not just interact once a week, but we also do things outside of church like go bowling, bake cookies, and go to corn mazes. I am apart of not only an organization but a family. The Wesley Foundation is my home away from home.



CAMILLA THOMAS LEMOYNE-OWEN COLLEGE

There is Genius, Enlightenment, and Fulfillment in Overcoming Obstacles

Diving deep into the mysteriousness and infinite truths of the imagination daily may not be everyone's central goal in life, but I am passionately in love with language and cannot wait to use the beauty of all that is poetic to serve, cherish, inspire and express love to the heart of the world and perform my art to an audience.

The word obstacle could represent so many things as an African American female from the inner city of Memphis Tennessee, but today I'm speaking specifically to identity, having a voice, and purpose. I met my father at the age of seven, at nine I lost him to cancer. At thirteen, I lost my grandmother and primary caretaker to heart disease. My life has been drastically changing for as long as I can remember. My mother gave birth to me when she was fifteen so I suppose there was trauma before I could perceive it. She was technically still a child and unable to love me the way I thought I needed, and I grew to be confused, lost, and I did not have a voice. I was a very angry teenager, upset at my family, the world, and with myself for letting the harshness and chaos get to me, and letting it dim my light.

In 2017 my aunt, Ms. Linda Faye Hall grew deathly ill with multiple sclerosis. It was sudden and devastating. She left me and my family this past February and we are forever changed because of this loss. She is a trailblazer and had shown us what a lack of struggle looked like. Because of her, I grew up with a travel experience, I am well-read, I am a leader, I know what love feels like, and I know what happiness looks like. One of the last things she said to me was "there is so much money to be made out here, go get it." The day she decided to stop talking because of MS is the day I decided to take everything that she'd given me and turn it into a recipe for success and greatness. The first step, graduation.

My career at LeMoyne-Owen college has been long and challenging, but life lessons from my professors, I will take with me forever. I majored in English Literature because I'm good with words, but now my intentions are true. Literature is complex and has opened a world of inspiration and creativity, taught me communication skills, and about myself and my past. To pursue my life and career goals I had to revert to my childhood, to remember what I was passionate about before being disillusioned by the world. On the occupation line of my middle school planner, it reads 'actress.' Not much has changed because my entire life revolves around poetry.

The art of poetry has presented enlightenment, truth, and lightness to my life. My poetry is overflowing with brilliance and performing brings me joy. I've written novels and scripts and I am excited about producing them. My focus has shifted to the issues of oppression, feminism, and marginalization so that I can bring inspiration and hope to my community. Being involved in library programs at LOC has helped to broaden my knowledge about my history and now I have a better sense of individuality and identity. Receiving the NFWL scholarship will have such a profound impact on my academic career as well as my life goals. This opportunity has inspired me and motivated me to work harder. There are people on my side to help me excel in college and life. For this I am grateful. Gratitude and success to me depend on overcoming obstacles, adjusting to new ideas, and believing in myself for a greater purpose, and so I can let my light shine.

2021 STUDENT SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS



PARLIAMENTARIAN