On Campus

A Full Ride to General Studies, Thanks to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

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A few years ago, Claudia Rice ’02GS held a human skull during an introductory archaeology class at Montgomery College in Maryland and suddenly found herself reconsidering her lifelong dream of becoming an archaeologist.

When she decided to study art history instead, Rice looked for the schools with the best programs and sent off some e-mail queries. Not only was Columbia one of the best—it was also the most responsive. Within two hours Rice had a response from Hilary Ballon, professor of art history and archaeology at Columbia, who invited her to sit in on some classes and meet some of the faculty.

Rice was anxiously awaiting a financial aid package from Columbia when the big letter arrived.

The letter was from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation informing her that she was among the inaugural class of Gates Millennium Scholars, a group of 4,050 students nationwide selected to receive a full scholarship to study the subject of their choice at any college or university to which they’ve been accepted. The Gates Foundation initiated the program in 1999, pledging $1 billion over twenty years to pay for low-income minority students to go to college. (Rice’s parents are from Chile.)

Rice focused her studies on nineteenth-century art. Among her favorite works are those by Austrian artist Gustav Klimt, considered the father of German expressionism. “I appreciate most that he experimented with every artistic style of the nineteenth through the early twentieth century and excelled at each one,” she says.

Inspired by the opportunities she’s been given, Rice is helping others to live out their aspirations as well. Last year, the first annual Rice Scholarship—a small scholarship, established and funded by Rice herself—was awarded to a student in the honors program at Montgomery. “I just want to give someone else hope,” she says.



Guide to school abbreviations

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