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MENU

Harlen, Xu named among 2018 Schulich Leaders

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BY PAUL MAYNE



Tony Xu and Ryan Harlen, two of the nation's highest achieving secondary students, will begin their undergraduate studies at Western this fall as recipients of prestigious [Schulich Leaders Scholarships](#).

Launched in 2012, the \$100-million scholarship program – funded by Canadian philanthropist Seymour Schulich – provides for 50 undergraduate scholarships across top Canadian universities each year. The program aims to allow the country's most promising students to pursue their dreams and become global leaders in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

Two scholarship recipients are selected at each of the 20 participating universities, with five universities receiving an additional two scholarships for attracting the most applications. Students heading into engineering receive \$100,000 while those planning to study other disciplines within science receive \$80,000.



XU

It's not surprising Tony Xu would be heading into engineering since, at age 10, he built his own computer. The Earl Haig Secondary School (North York, Ont.) graduate hopes to continue this curiosity when he begins this fall at Western, spirited on by a \$100,000 Schulich Leader scholarship.

"I chose Western because of their emphasis on an interdisciplinary education," said Xu, who got the phone call with the news while commuting home from school. "Western requires students to take a breadth of courses, spanning multiple fields. I believe the solution to many of our problems lie at the intersection of machine intelligence and various other fields."

Through data science workshops he ran in North York, and weekly at his school, Xu taught more than 180 youth how to analyze large data-sets to find insights. He and his team analyzed 550,000 scientific papers to determine how researchers can increase the impact value of their research and published the findings in the *STEM Fellowship Journal*.

His group also analyzed 20 years of data, spanning 217 countries, to determine factors predicting greenhouse gas emissions per capita and identifying the demographic producing the greatest carbon footprint.

None of this is surprising to Doug Lawrence, a guidance counsellor at Earl Haig Secondary School.

“He is just overwhelmingly competent in the sciences. His ability to be responsive and innovative; he’s just such a smart kid,” said Lawrence, adding Xu may be a little shy at first, but once he gets comfortable, he’s going to do some amazing things.

“He’s going to be a huge leader in the computer science field. He has time to build into that and learn more at Western. But he is a quick-thinking guy. He’s just so curious and willing to go that much further than the average kid. He’s going to better than fine, he’s going to excel.”

To continue his research endeavours, Xu said Western’s focus on an interdisciplinary education will equip him with the skills necessary to be a changemaker.

“Not only does the scholarship allow me to focus completely on my education, it grants me the financial freedom to pursue my own projects,” he said. “I am looking forward to immersing myself in Western’s spirited school environment and I’m particularly eager to explore Western’s extracurriculars.”

Upon graduation, Xu plans to pursue graduate studies or start his own company by apply the knowledge he is confident Western give him to solve real-world problems.

He added a huge thank you goes to his parents for their “boundless love and support,” along with the teachers at Earl Haig Secondary School.



HARLEN

For Harlen, the opportunity to come to Western, with its strong game development program, and on top of that being known as a Schulich Leader, was a lot to take in at first.

“At first when I received the phone call, I was quite surprised, and I did not know exactly what it meant for me,” he said. “When realization finally settled in, I felt incredibly honoured and very fortunate to have been selected for the scholarship. It was an exciting moment.”

While a strong student in the sciences – where 100 per cent scores in courses was not out of the question – Harlen is equally as skilled in sports, music and other activities in and around his community. A University of Waterloo math champion and Green Award winner at Saltfleet District High School in Stoney Creek, Ont., Harlen said the \$80,000 scholarship removes a huge financial weight most students face entering university.

“The scholarship is extremely helpful as it alleviates the financial burden of the cost of tuition and other university related expenses. Of course, my parents are thrilled, too, especially as I have an older brother who is also currently in university,” laughed Harlen. “The scholarship money will definitely allow me to focus more on schooling since I won’t have to worry about juggling assignments with employment.”

Saltfleet guidance counsellor Michelle Sandoval, who nominated Harlen, said he is a humble and quiet leader.

“He is extremely bright and focused on the end goal – no matter what it is,” Sandoval said. “He is so well rounded, so fantastic and we’re all so happy for him. He’s someone who really deserves it and to add this (scholarship) to the next step in his journey was so rewarding to see. This is just the beginning for him. You’re getting a star.”

What appealed to Harlen about Western was the science program where, along with obtaining a major or honours specialization in computer science, it offers a unique opportunity to obtain a minor in game development, which he can’t wait

to delve into.

“One of the first things that appealed to me about Western as well was the campus,” he said. “It has an open feeling with lots of green space, providing a relaxed and peaceful environment. I am most looking forward to the new experiences that come along with university life, such as living in residence. On top of that, I am excited to learn more about computer science in lectures and labs throughout the upcoming year.”

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