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Building a new generation of STEM leaders

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McGill Schulich Leaders Julie Wong and Alexander Deans (Photo: Owen Egan)

 by *Andrew Mahon*

When the **Schulich Leader Scholarships** were launched four years ago, they were hailed as the second largest scholarship endowment (\$100 million) in Canadian history and dubbed “Canada’s Rhodes Scholarships.”

Today, with a growing cohort of 170 Schulich Leaders across the country (including eight McGill students), the program has firmly established itself in its own right as a driving force for science, technology, engineering or mathematics (STEM) students – and the most graphic illustration of its profound impact are the Schulich scholars themselves.

“It was very cool to be part of the inaugural class,” says **Julie Wong**, who won her scholarship to study chemical engineering at McGill in 2012. “The scholarship has afforded me a lot of opportunities and certainly motivated me in terms of my own approach to leadership.”

Now a fourth-year student, Wong volunteers her time to a wide range of extra-curricular activities including the Royal Victoria Hospital. Last summer she completed an internship working in the oil and gas industry – where her office was often an oil rig.

“For me, leadership has always been about trying new things and pushing boundaries,” she says.

Each year, every high school and CEGEP in Canada is invited to nominate one graduating student for a Schulich Leader Scholarship. Nominees then apply directly to any of the 20 participating Canadian universities. 50 scholarships are awarded each year (25 engineering degree scholarships each worth \$80,000 and 25 science, technology or math degree scholarships, each worth \$60,000).

The scholarships are the brainchild of Seymour Schulich, BSc’61, MBA’65, DLitt’04, one of Canada’s foremost philanthropists, who has donated in excess of \$350 million to various causes, focusing on health care and education.

“Our goal is to help graduating high school student leaders realize their dreams through the pursuit of a university STEM degree,” says Schulich. “It is immensely important to invest in the next generation of technology innovators.”

Among McGill’s most recent Schulich Leaders is **Alexander Deans**, who won his scholarship in 2015.

Deans’ extra-curricular achievements include the creation of the ‘iAid’, a revolutionary navigation device for the blind which earned a gold medal at the Canada Wide Science Fair and second place worldwide at the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair, as well as the 2014 “Future Leaders” honour from *Maclean’s* magazine.

“This scholarship is an opportunity to challenge myself,” he says. “My experience is in innovation and I hope to inspire others to become innovators.”

In 2016, the first wave of Schulich Leaders will be graduating and the lasting impact of the program will begin to manifest itself in Canada’s next generation of business and technology leaders, many of them embracing the same philosophy which

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inspired Schulich when he launched the program four years ago.

"The scholarship has had an immense impact on my life," says Wong. "It allowed me to go to university at McGill. I'd like to provide that opportunity to other people in the future."

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