

FINANCIAL AID AND AWARDS

Searching for Scholarships Secret #1: Who are you?

"Who are you?" is a fundamental question not only of life, but of scholarship searches. You see, scholarships are essentially gifts to students from individuals or groups who want to help a certain group of people achieve their higher education goals. The sponsors of scholarships very often choose criteria which mirror either their own characteristics or the characteristics of the person they wished to be. As such, it's vitally important that you determine who you are in great detail - that detail will be essential to finding scholarships specifically tailored to your background.

What's special about scholarships tailored to your background? In addition to making connections with individuals or groups that are like you, the more specific your scholarship search is, the better your chances are of being awarded a scholarship, because you will face less competition.

So what should you know about yourself? Here are some key questions. These questions will help you find scholarships. Make note of them on a separate sheet of paper or in a separate document on your computer. A word of caution: you may be tempted to skip this step or gloss over it. Don't. The work you do now will pay off later, and if you skip this step or the details in this step, it will definitely hurt you in your search later!

What have you done so far in life?

Make lists of different things you've done, different hobbies, sports, activities, events you've attended, places you've been or lived, grades and awards achieved in school so far. All of these seemingly trivial details will come in handy during your search, so be thorough. Even things that seem inconsequential, like a club you belonged to when you were very young such as the Boy Scouts or Girl Guides is important.

Who do you know in life?

Again, make lists of people you know, famous or not, as well as companies you or your family do business with, groups or organizations of which you are a member, friends, family members, service providers, even silly things like who your doctor or dentist is. Don't leave out organizations that you may not be a part of, but your immediate family is, especially your parents. Everything is in the details.

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Where are you going?

In life, in school, in all things. If you have strong feelings about the direction of your life, your education, and your future, make note of them. Is there a career or a selection of careers that you are interested in? Is there a hobby you love so much that you would love to make a career out of it? Is there a school you've visited in your travels that really resonated with you, that felt almost like a long lost home? Make notes on these items.

Make a list of things that drive you, that motivate you, things that keep you awake at night. What's always on your mind? What do you have dreams about? Ending poverty? Fighting injustice? As always, make a list.

What's so interesting?

This will probably be the hardest question to answer, and also the most rewarding, at least scholarship-wise. Name five things about you that, as far as you know, are unique to you and only you. If you have trouble with this, get together with some close friends and ask them.

May I see your papers?

This is where things get organized - take all of these lists and combine them with all the papers and tidbits you've gathered so far - report cards, certificates, business cards, etc. Do you have a comprehensive picture of your life so far? Organize what you've gathered into a few major categories - the five A's: academics, activities, athletics, achievements, and associations.

By now you should have a personality and history profile of yourself that is astonishingly, and perhaps even alarmingly, complete. You know who you are to a great degree, and you know in general what you are thinking about doing with your life, and why.

Once you've done your lists, pickup an "Additional Resources" handout (available just outside the Financial Aid Office or on our Web site at www.capilanou.ca) that shows various Web sites you can explore to start searching for scholarships. Some sites ask you to provide a personal profile of yourself to aid in looking for a match. Good news is, you've already done the hard work – now you can focus on the search. Good luck.

Source: Student Loan Network, December 2005 Issue : Scholarship Search Secrets, Part 2