

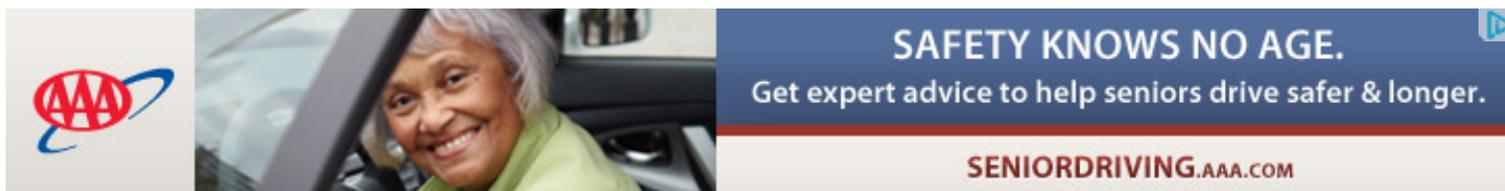
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scholarships

# College in reach

## Credit a UO program, the Gates Foundation and hard work

By Diane Dietz

The Register-Guard

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A University of Oregon summer college prep program for underprivileged middle schoolers ally-ooped a Springfield teenager into the loving arms of Bill and Melinda Gates — who will pay for her college education

from freshman year to doctoral degree.

And that's a good thing, too, because the girl, Springfield High School senior Hayley Pratt-Stibich, is aiming for the higher reaches of science.

She's not into merely plain physics.

"Particle physics," she said. "What I really want to do is go to Switzerland to work with the large hadron collider, smashing particles together at speeds nearing the speed of light in attempts to re-create the big bang."

Pratt-Stibich is a lifelong Springfield girl. She was born at the McKenzie-Willamette Medical Center, the second child of Terri and Tom Pratt-Stibich. She attended Centennial Elementary, Springfield Middle School and Springfield High School, where the graduation rate is 59 percent.

Her mother, Terri Pratt-Stibich, supports the family with earnings from her wholesale bakery, called My Mom's Kitchen, where there wasn't a lot of spare income to save for the future, Hayley Pratt-Stibich said.

But from the time Hayley was a kid, her mother told her, "If you work hard enough, people will pay you to go to college," Hayley remembers.

UO reached out

Hayley Pratt-Stibich realized she had a knack for math in the third grade, when her teacher provided ice cream sundaes with the number of ingredients built on each student's knowledge of multiplication tables — and hers was elaborate.

She thrived with teacher Tresa Lively through the fourth and fifth grades. "She made sure you were challenged up to your abilities," Hayley Pratt-Stibich said.

By the time she arrived as a sixth-grader at Springfield Middle School, she was ready for eighth-grade math. "By eighth grade, I was going to high school for honors geometry," she said.

She was following her mother's directive to work hard. But she couldn't see how college would pan out — until "Bill and Bruce" turned up at one of her middle school math classes.

The visitors were UO economics professors Bill Harbaugh and Bruce Blonigen, who were playing out their plan to boost diversity at the university by focusing on helping students solely based on low socioeconomic status.

In 2006, the pair created the Summer Academy to Inspire Learning, a free, weeklong summer camp for bright eighth-graders from low-income families who were identified by their math teachers as promising.

Students repeat the camp each summer through high school graduation, studying at the university in the fields of economics, physics and human physiology, creativity and persuasion skills. Students also get practical information on finding their way into the pool of students in high school who are seen as college-bound, as well as how to set themselves up for college scholarships.

A strong sense of direction

Although the professors didn't look for diversity of color, race and ethnicity in their recruiting, the population turns out to have many of those characteristics, said program Executive Director Lara Fernandez. "We have a

lot of Hispanic students — just a whole melting pot of students,” she said.

The program gets disadvantaged students to college campuses early in their lives to allow them to see themselves belonging there. They get a sense of possibility and a confidence in their ability to go. “It’s huge,” said Carla Gary, assistant vice president at the UO Office of Institutional Equity and Diversity. “Otherwise, it’s that dream — that unscalable mountain. If college is not something that is spoken or mentioned, or to which you have familiarity, you are not likely to see yourself as college material,” she said.

Hayley Pratt-Stibich learned how to negotiate the system, for instance, doing well enough in middle school so teachers would sign the note to get her into honors classes.

This year, 125 students will attend the UO summer camp, which is now being replicated at Portland State University. Last year, the first full class of summer program students graduated from high school, Fernandez said. Out of 19 students, 17 went onto college. Eight chose the UO.

Through middle and high school, Pratt-Stibich maneuvered past all the turns that sometimes sidetrack girls. She kept her passion for mathematics.

She avoided losing herself in the shadow of a boyfriend. In fact, she doesn’t have one. “I would, but not with the selection that’s presented to me. It’s true girls mature at a different rate than boys. It seems pretty evident at this rate,” said Pratt-Stibich, who turns 18 next month.

She achieved.

“In high school I always worked hard. I have the 4.0 thing. I did Advanced Placement classes. I did honors classes. I did everything I could to work toward scholarships because that’s how I was going to pay for college.”

Observers said there was little doubt she’d get there.

“She’s one of those kids that everybody knows is on track,” Fernandez said.

An inquisitive mind

Her high school physics teacher, Art Diddle, said he isn’t surprised by her success. “She’s very inquisitive, which is the important part,” he said.

At the UO, physics associate professor Raghuvier Parthasarathy noticed the same thing. Parthasarathy is one of 80 UO profs who do volunteer teaching at the summer camp. “She really liked to ask questions, and she gets engaged in activities. That’s like really crucial for success in physics.

“If they’re getting absorbed enough to ask, ‘What do I know and what do I not know?’, that’s a really good sign. She’s enthusiastic and thoughtful about asking questions.”

When Pratt-Stibich went into her final year of high school last fall, it was time to test her mother’s theory about people being willing to pay.

Among the scholarships she applied for was the Gates Millennium Scholars program. The program was launched a dozen years ago by the Microsoft founder to develop a diversified cadre of future leaders who could help the United States remain competitive in the global economy, according to the Gates Foundation.

Bill and Melinda Gates kicked in \$1.6 billion to sponsor 1,000 new scholars each year for 20 years. The scholarship pays for whatever the student can't get other grants or scholarships to cover, including books, fees, travel and living expenses.

UO her only choice

This year, 23,000 students applied for the award. Pratt-Stibich was among 1,000 who were chosen. She met the scholarship criteria by being demonstrably bright, by being from a low-income family, and, because her paternal grandmother was El Salvadoran, she qualifies as an Hispanic. The Gates scholarship targets students who are African-American, American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian Pacific Islander American, and Hispanic-American.

The Gates scholarship is doing its part to help diversify the UO campus. So far, 31 award winners have studied there.

With 17.6 percent minority students, the UO is as diverse as Oregon, which has 16.4 percent minority residents.

"The numbers in the state are an indicator," the UO's Gary said, "but that's not going to be a limitation because we're preparing young people for the world and Oregon is not representative of the world. We're moving forward. That's important."

Hayley Pratt-Stibich could use the Gates scholarship to attend any U.S. university, but she applied only to go to the UO, which she had long ago set her mind on. Given the UO's tuition and fees, the scholarship over time could be worth as much as \$118,000 to her, depending on the outside grants she's able to get and what subject she pursues for her doctorate.

"It's a research university," she said. "It has incredible professors. It has incredible opportunities for people in science. But at the same time, it's not like one of the bigger schools where everybody who goes there is going for science. I wanted to get my start some place where I could get into the lab, where there were amazing people, but it wasn't so cut-throat and (sharp) elbows."

Pratt-Stibich said she wants to see the world and probably will leave Oregon for her graduate work. But that can wait, she said. "I'll probably get homesick living in the dorms, to be honest."

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## Gates Scholars

The scholarship fund, set up by Microsoft founder Bill Gates and his wife, has helped 31 students attend the University of Oregon since its inception a dozen years ago. This year's Gates scholars include three local students.

Springfield High School: Alisen Hinton and Hayley Pratt-Stibich

North Eugene High School: Thomas Hiura

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