



Presentation of Liz Chinchilla

2014 Alexander Hamilton Scholar at the Texas Regional Convention of the National Association of Residential Property Managers (NARPM)

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My name is Liz Chinchilla and I am a 2014 Alexander Hamilton Scholar. Today, I have the privilege of sharing with you all some of the ways that this program has equipped and empowered me throughout the last six years.

I want to start with asking you all to close your eyes to envision the following scenario with me. Think of a low-socioeconomic high school in an inner-city community. This area is known for its poverty and high crime rates. The students who attend this school go through metal detectors as a safety precaution every morning. They sport mesh backpacks and matching uniforms down the hallways. This school is largely underfunded and lacks basic resources, such as up-to-date textbooks and supplies. There is an unspoken expectation from those around them that they are in high school to prepare to enter the workforce. Many of these students are responsible for contributing to their households financially while they are still minors. A large amount of them will be the first in their families to graduate from high school. The world of higher education is rarely discussed, and students are often left feeling that it is not a place where they belong.

You can open your eyes. The high school I described was the one I attended only a few years back and likely one that is familiar to many of my fellow AHS peers. I ask you to picture this scenario to make a point that Alexander Hamilton Scholars has proven to understand well. When we focus solely on an individual's circumstances, we miss the opportunity to see all the other parts that comprise their story.

I first learned about Alexander Hamilton Scholars six years ago on a black hole of google searches for "scholarships for juniors." I spent hours on the website, reading about the program curriculum and the values they held. I looked through photos of leader weeks in Seattle and Guatemala. I read about previous scholars, who programmed robots for fun and went on to attend Ivy League universities. By the time I had finished browsing the website, I had talked myself out of applying entirely as "I would never be selected for a program like this one"; imposters syndrome in its truest form.

As I'm sure you've gathered by now, I ended up submitting my application a few hours before the deadline that year. I told myself that the worst that could happen was being declined. You can imagine my surprise when I was extended an invitation to join the 2014 Hamilton Scholars Cohort three rounds later. As a high school junior, I could have never imagined the ways that my small leap of courage would continue to reap benefits as a twenty-two-year-old college graduate.

Since the beginning, AHS has afforded me opportunities that have been formative in my success. At the end of my first year with the program, I met my cohort in person. It was made up of 25* other high-achieving students attending universities all over the U.S. I still remember the way we connected for the first time as we discussed the many fears, we had about starting college that upcoming fall. We put pen-to-paper as we developed personal development plans for the years ahead. We went through much-need

financial aid workshops and spent time networking with professionals we could only hope to one day become.

A year later, we met in Guatemala for our International Leader Week. This week was the time I made some of the closest connections with my cohort and our mentors, as we were away from much of what was familiar to us. Whether it was dancing with children in the courtyard of an elementary school or watching an artisan who is beautifully versed in her craft create art to support her family, I recall recognizing a deep sense of faith that stitched the people of Guatemala together. In my personal life, I felt like I had unlocked a significant part of my story here that I didn't have an understanding for before this trip. It was also a vulnerable time, where many tears were shed as we digested our first year of college together. We had many conversations about what leadership meant to us and how we could apply those values to better advocate for our communities and our world.

Just last year, we met for our very last leader week in Dallas. It was there where we revisited our professional development plans once again and adjusted accordingly as many of our goals had evolved or changed. We participated in mock-interviews and attended info-sessions to prepare us for the big changes that were ahead.

Alexander Hamilton Scholars has been so much more than just a scholarship program to me. It has taught me to take the events that comprise my story and to learn from them instead of being defined by them. It taught me to put pen to paper to build tangible goals for the future. Looking back post-grad, not all those goals came to fruition. Some of them look differently than I thought they would, and others have changed entirely. I am learning that it was so much less about the tangible goal and so much more about pinpointing the values that would propel me forward no matter what path I took. It was about building the confidence to believe that I have an invaluable perspective to offer to the world around me. Ultimately, it was about learning to use my unique experiences to serve others.

In May of 2019, I graduated from The University of Oklahoma as a first-generation college student. Today, I am applying my experiences and strengths as a research assistant at Aphasia Research and Treatment Lab at The University of Texas at Austin. The work we do at the lab aims to learn more about bilingual individuals with communication disorders in order to improve treatment outcomes. After my gap year, I am pursuing a master's degree in speech language pathology. I am confident in my ability to bring creative and empathetic solutions to the table and I believe that I will be a great clinician because of it. My long-term goal is to tell people's stories through clinical research in order to build a more inclusive future in the world of healthcare. Thank you, Alexander Hamilton Scholars for teaching me that success is not linear. Often, it is the twists and turns that develop in us our deepest values that we use to build our vision.



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