

Momentum Builders Scholarship pays dividends for physics students

June 17, 2024 by [Adam Elliott Segal](#) - [A&S News](#)



The Momentum Builders Scholarship was a game-changer for Taha Sayed Aboshanab.

“Even though the scholarship is financial, it reverberates in so many other aspects in my life — psychological, social. It’s way bigger than just the financial investment.”

Aboshanab is a third-year physics student and a member of [Trinity College](#) and one of the first to receive the scholarship, awarded to Indigenous and Black students.

The scholarship was spearheaded by Kimberly Strong, chair of the [Department of Physics](#), who donated in the hopes of breaking down systemic barriers for those who wish to pursue STEM careers.



Sallam Saka, 2024 Momentum Builders Scholarship award winner. Photo: Eva Cheung.

“The goal of the scholarship is to provide additional financial support to these students, and, more importantly, encouragement. What we’d like to do is build up a cohort of students in our faculty and have events that bring these students together. It’s more than just giving money — it’s about providing additional support to deserving students,” says Strong. “Thanks to the generosity of many donors, we have raised an endowment that will enable us to award this scholarship annually for years to come.”

Another recipient of the scholarship, Ezra Msolla, a third-year student and a member of [New College](#), echoed Aboshanab’s thoughts on the impact of the award.

“In a city like Toronto that’s so multicultural, the initiative to help and promote awareness can’t be understated. It’s important to know the school is taking steps toward making STEM more accessible for Indigenous and Black students. Having received recognition is a good signal to myself about the steps I’ve taken to get to this point, and to show other students opportunities are out there,” says Msolla.

Strong, who was encouraged to see a larger pool of applicants in response to the second call for applications, recently announced the 2024 winners. Sallam Saka, one of two recipients of this year’s scholarship and a member of [Woodsworth College](#) just completed his first year in biological physics.

“I have always loved physics and biology for their ability to explain the physical phenomena and the intricacies of living organisms,” says Saka, who hopes to go to medical school.

“We’re looking to encourage students to appreciate physics as a topic and to see it as a field in which they can contribute ideas and insights,” says Strong. “We want our department to feel welcoming and comfortable and a place where they’re able to achieve their educational goals.”

Those goals are top of mind for Aboshanab.

“The scholarship letter restored a lot of faith in my capacity and potential to do what’s best for my community,” says Aboshanab, who finished on the dean’s list in his second year. “After all, that’s what I’m studying physics for. To investigate and understand how the world works in the hope of making people’s lives easier.”

Similar scholarships have already made a tremendous impact across the Faculty of Arts & Science. Riley Yesno earned an honours bachelor of arts in political science and Indigenous studies as a member of Victoria College in [June 2021 and was honoured with a President’s Award for Outstanding Indigenous Student of the Year Award](#). She credited scholarships for her success.

“I am not exaggerating when I say the only reason I have been able to make it through my undergrad was because of financial support. I am extremely grateful for the opportunities these scholarships helped afford me,” Yesno said at the time.

For recipients of the Momentum Builders Scholarship, the benefits go beyond the classroom.

“My goal is to continue being a life-long learner,” says Aboshanab.



The Momentum Builders Scholarship helps fuel the next generation of researchers in the Department of Physics. Photo credit: Pursue STEM



Taha Aboshanab, previous recipient of the Momentum Builders Scholarship. Photo: Supplied.

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We wish to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

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