



**Priya Deshpande**  
*Huntley High School*

When Priya Deshpande was a “confused preteen,” she watched as her father developed a fibrous mass on his shoulder, then as he underwent surgery to prevent him from losing feeling in his arm.

During her father’s recovery, Priya would disinfect his medical equipment, keep a chart of how much blood he lost and change his bandages.

“While spending time with my father, I realized what an effect doctors — some of whom had checked on him for a few minutes — had on his life,” Priya wrote. The experience set her down a path that would take her from playing nurse to her ailing father, to a lab where she learned to perform medical tests and surgery.

Priya spent one summer as a medical intern, working with medical students, researchers and engineering students to attach a spine to a robot and perform tests on it.

Priya is about to start her training in earnest. Next year, she plans to study biological sciences at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

The high school senior says she wants to have the same impact on her patients that doctors had on her father when she was a scared kid.

— Jameel Naqvi



**Stephen Dunbar**  
*Geneva High School*

Stephen W. R. Dunbar is thrilled that he’s been accepted at his first choice, Dartmouth College.

That’s because Dartmouth, he says, requires a student to study a lot of different things to graduate as a well-rounded person. That suits him, because he doesn’t know what he wants to do with the rest of his life.

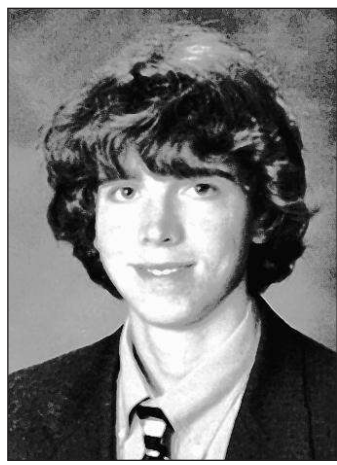
“I do not view college as job training. I see it as an opportunity to learn as much as possible,” he wrote. He is contemplating a career in research, to take advantage of his love of learning.

He was a three-year member of the varsity choir, and competed with the Worldwide Youth and Science in Engineering, speech and math teams.

His counselor was impressed by his ability to hold down a part-time job at a convalescent home while still participating in many extracurricular and academic activities.

“Whether ... in the classroom, on stage or simply in the hallways, this multitasking individual’s major contributions are a willingness to be intellectually challenged in various forums, sincere academic motivation and willingness to serve both school and community,” the counselor wrote.

— Susan Sarkauskas



**Patrick Eschenfeldt**  
*St. Charles North High School*

Counselor Robert Freitag calls Patrick Eschenfeldt a “Triple Crown” winner. The St. Charles North senior is the class valedictorian and a National Merit finalist, and he posted a perfect ACT score.

“Obviously he has a special academic ability which he acknowledges, but about which he is quite humble,” Freitag wrote in his nomination letter.

At North, Patrick has been involved in math team, Model United Nations, concert band, wind ensemble and volleyball. He was the school’s newspaper editor and was Academic All-Conference for cross country.

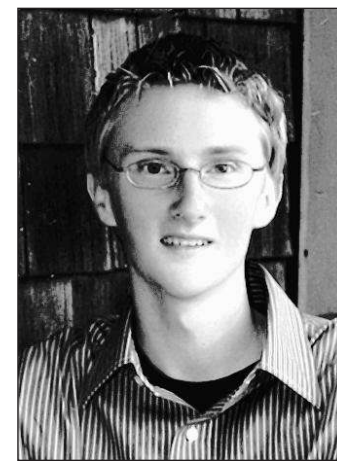
And that’s all while maintaining a straight-A transcript, getting a perfect ACT score and a 2350 on his SAT.

Patrick wants to attend Washington University in St. Louis and major in mathematics and history.

He hasn’t decided on a specific career path yet because he wants to learn more before deciding what to do.

“I want to do more than simply understand,” he wrote. “I want to add new thought to the world.”

— Leslie Hague



**Shaun O’Berry**  
*Geneva High School*

It took a 19-year-old cancer patient to remind Shaun O’Berry what he wanted out of life. At a Stanford University summer institute for gifted students last summer, he interviewed the woman for a project.

“I was stunned that a woman this young — only one year older than I — was stricken with such a terrible disease,” he wrote. “It taught me to never take anything for granted and to appreciate everything I have.”

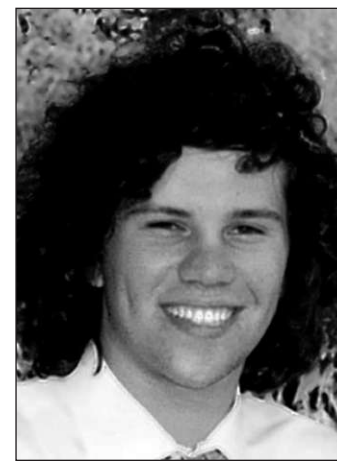
The Geneva High School senior wants to be a doctor and make a difference. Shaun’s academic record paves the way for those kinds of goals, wrote Principal Thomas Rogers.

“I am confident that this student is destined for future success,” he wrote.

Shaun exhausted the school’s math curriculum by his junior year and enrolled in an online math class at the University of Illinois.

He was a state qualifier for the Worldwide Youth in Science and Engineering’s chemistry competition. He is also a member of the math team, an Academic All-Conference member of the varsity golf team, and the Spanish National Honor Society president.

— Leslie Hague



**Daniel Vecchiolla**  
*Elgin Academy*

Daniel Vecchiolla enjoys math even when he plays soccer. As a ball flies off his foot, he’s thinking about its angle.

“I am one of the few people who actually enjoy working on the math section of a standardized test,” wrote the Elgin Academy senior.

An affinity for numbers may be in his genetic code: His dad is a chief financial officer, and his mother is a certified public accountant.

A research project for a psychology project gave him a glimpse of how he may enjoy math in a career. “I found it very enjoyable working with the numbers to see if my results could be generalized for the whole population,” he wrote.

Vecchiolla’s sponsor noted that he is the “go-to guy” if a fellow student needs help understanding work.

“It is important to note the process by which he has obtained his academic success is through earnest, diligent hard work. He is the student who will stay after class, work through lunch, or find a teacher after school in order to be sure he understands the material presented from every angle,” the counselor wrote.

Vecchiolla has been accepted at Boston College, Columbia University and Fordham University.

— Susan Sarkauskas

**Priya Deshpande**

**School:** Huntley High School  
**Hometown:** Lake in the Hills  
**Parents:** Vijay and Manisha Deshpande  
**School sponsor:** Counselor Karen Miller  
**Class rank:** 3 out of 348  
**Test scores:** ACT: 34  
**Planned major:** Biological sciences  
**Awards, honors:** Quill and Scroll inductee; 2007 businessperson of the year award; AP Scholar

**Stephen Dunbar**

**School:** Geneva High School  
**Hometown:** Geneva  
**Parents:** Diane Cleary and William Dunbar  
**School sponsor:** Counselor Cathy Pool  
**Class rank:** 1 out of 348, weighted; fourth unweighted  
**Test scores:** ACT: 32  
**Planned college major:** Chemistry  
**Awards, honors:** National Honor Society; French National Honor Society; AP Scholar with honors

**Patrick Eschenfeldt**

**School:** St. Charles North High School  
**Hometown:** St. Charles  
**Parents:** William Eschenfeldt and Christine Clark  
**School sponsor:** Counselor Robert Freitag  
**Class rank:** 1 out of 526  
**Test scores:** ACT: 36; SAT: 2350  
**Planned majors:** math and history  
**Awards, honors:** National Merit Finalist; Math Team Regionals winner; academic all-conference for cross country

**Shaun O’Berry**

**School:** Geneva High School  
**Hometown:** Geneva  
**Parents:** Sherry and Greg O’Berry  
**School sponsor:** Principal Thomas Rogers  
**Class rank:** 5 out of 451  
**Test scores:** ACT: 34  
**Planned college majors:** pre-medicine, biology, biomedical engineering  
**Awards, honors:** Worldwide Youth in Science and Engineering state qualifier; ISAC state scholar; Prairie State Achievement Award

**Daniel Vecchiolla**

**School:** Elgin Academy  
**Hometown:** St. Charles  
**Parents:** Corinne and Joseph Vecchiolla  
**School sponsor:** Counselor Sharon Williams  
**Test scores:** ACT: 35; SAT: 2130  
**Planned majors:** Math and engineering  
**Awards, honors:** Cum Laude Society; Spanish National Honor Society; Excellence in U.S. History award



**Stephanie Wahl**  
*Larkin High School*

Excelling at school is one thing for Stephanie Wahl. Helping others to do the same is another.

Midway through her junior year, the Larkin student was struck by one of the clearest epiphanies of her life. “I wanted to teach. I want to teach, I will teach,” she said.

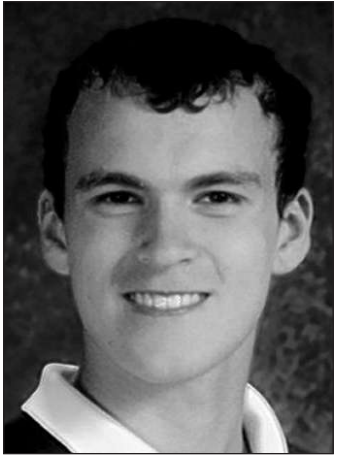
A member of the school’s visual and performing arts academy for gifted students, Stephanie feels she’s been given a number of resources to become a teacher.

A performer, Stephanie has used acting experience to become comfortable speaking in front of large groups. Academically, she is ranked first in her class of 488 students.

Stephanie plans to pursue degrees in mathematics and secondary education at either Michigan State, Vanderbilt or the University of Illinois.

Her counselor calls Stephanie a well-grounded leader. Besides participating in school activities such as math team, orchestra, choir and drama, she heads a canned food drive at Thanksgiving, reads stories to elementary students, and volunteers at the community crisis center.

— Kerry Lester



**Jacob Walker**  
*Huntley High School*

Jacob Walker isn’t one to accept the status quo.

The Huntley High School senior has excelled on AP tests for classes his school doesn’t even offer, and already has completed 300-level college classes.

He is ranked first in his class of 348 students, with a 4.886 GPA on a weighted scale.

He has taken 13 AP classes, with the highest score — a 5 — on each of the related tests. He studied for many of those tests outside of school. He has been named a National AP Scholar and a National Merit finalist, and is the student representative on the district school board. And he could have met the requirements to attend college after his sophomore year.

“He is brilliant, thoughtful, and careful with his words, respectful of peers as well as staff, giving to his church and school, and has an unquenchable need to test his intellectual boundaries,” a counselor wrote. Although he hasn’t decided on a specific career path, Jacob wrote that whatever he does, he wants to make a difference. “I want to take as much from this life as I can and give back just as much,” he wrote.

— Leslie Hague



**Samantha Young**  
*Larkin High School*

Samantha Young has two loves: theater and history. The Larkin High School senior hopes to pursue both in college at Columbia, NYU or the University of London.

Samantha has received multiple academic awards, including being named a National Merit commended scholar and Rotary scholar. She also received the AP Scholar award. She is vice president of the National Honor Society, and is third in her class of 486.

Counselor Larry Hight noted that in addition to her academic prowess, she was involved in multiple performing arts groups, athletics and volunteer work. The canned food drive that Samantha led was the largest collection ever for the school.

“She is all about family, community, volunteering to help the world’s needs, school, respecting people and enjoying life to the fullest,” Hight wrote in his nomination letter.

Samantha is excited about the opportunities to learn and grow in college. “I feel I can put the knowledge gained from the past to use in the present, and hopefully, the future,” she wrote.

— Leslie Hague



**Julia Yurkovska**  
*Crystal Lake South*

Five suitcases — that’s all Julia Yurkovska’s family had when they arrived in the United States more than a decade ago.

Julia, who was 7 at the time, had to adjust to a new language, new customs and a new way of life.

More than 10 years later, Julia has overcome the early struggles of adjustment and is near the top of her graduating class at Crystal Lake South High School — and poised to enter one of Illinois’ top universities.

By Julia’s own account, the journey that took her from her native Ukraine to the top ranks of suburban high school students was not an easy one.

“The years leading up to college have proven to be the hardest of all the roadblocks that have ever stood in my way,” Julia wrote in her essay.

But it was during those difficult years that Julia found her calling. An impressive schedule of advanced science classes nurtured Julia’s interest in forensic science.

Julia says she’s prepared for the next step in her journey.

“All that is required is to take life in stride and meet the future with a glimmer in the eye, a smile on the lips and a laugh in the heart,” she wrote.

— Jameel Naqvi



**Christina Zima**  
*Elgin High School*

Christina Zima first learned to lead at the dinner table. “Everyone in my family is intelligent, argumentative and strong-willed,” she writes. “Through years of dinner table debates, I discovered my passion for cross-examinations and defense tactics. I fell in love with the intellectual challenge of the argument.”

Christina intends to pursue a business degree at the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School of Business, with the eventual goal of becoming a lawyer.

The Elgin senior is president of the school’s National Honor Society and served as a class council officer for three years. A member of the Hanover Park Committee on Youth, Christina regularly participates in planning community service projects. She spent her summers studying at pre-college programs at the University of Pennsylvania and Washington University.

“Christina will be a tremendous asset to any college campus,” her counselor, Laura Sellers, writes. “She is intelligent, self-motivated and enjoys being involved in her school and community in many ways ... I believe wholeheartedly she will be very successful.”

— Kerry Lester

**Stephanie Wahl**

**School:** Larkin High School  
**Hometown:** Elgin  
**Parents:** John and Theresa Wahl  
**School sponsor:** Counselor Larry Hight  
**Class rank:** 1 out of 488  
**Test scores:** ACT: 35; SAT: 2270  
**Planned college majors:** Mathematics, secondary education  
**Awards, honors:** National Merit commended scholar; National Honor Society; AP Scholar; Illinois State Scholar; Illinois General Assembly recognition

**Jacob Walker**

**School:** Huntley High School  
**Hometown:** Lake in the Hills  
**Parents:** Charles and Marsha Walker  
**Class rank:** 1 out of 348  
**Test scores:** ACT: 35; SAT: 2230  
**Planned college majors:** Mathematics, philosophy, economics  
**Awards, honors:** District Award of Excellence; National Merit finalist; National AP Scholar

**Samantha Young**

**School:** Larkin High School  
**Hometown:** Elgin  
**Parents:** Kristine and Steven Young  
**School sponsor:** Counselor Larry Hight  
**Class rank:** 3 out of 486  
**Test scores:** ACT: 34  
**Planned college majors:** Theater production and history  
**Awards, honors:** Daughters of the American Revolution; Rotary Scholar; AP Scholar award; National Merit commended scholar

**Julia Yurkovska**

**School:** Crystal Lake South High School  
**Hometown:** Lake in the Hills  
**Parents:** Oleh and Oksana Yurkovska  
**School sponsor:** Principal Marsha Putthoff  
**Class rank:** 3 out of 460  
**Test scores:** ACT: 32; SAT: 1970  
**Planned college major:** Forensic science  
**Awards, honors:** Illinois State Scholar; AP Scholar; Congressional Student Leadership Conference

**Christina Zima**

**School:** Elgin High School  
**Hometown:** Elgin  
**Parents:** Donna and Gary Zima  
**School sponsor:** Laura Sellers, counselor  
**Class rank:** 4 out of 472  
**Test scores:** ACT: 34  
**Planned majors:** Business and law  
**Awards, honors:** AP Scholar with distinction; Illinois State Scholar; National Merit commended scholar