Meet Our Scholars

Yo San University launched its new Scholarship Program in Fall 2005 to offer financial incentive and encouragement to extraordinary students. These scholarships express Yo San’s commitment to advance the traditional Chinese healing arts in the West, and attract and train the highest caliber students.

The Yo San Scholarship is awarded to students with a record of exemplary academic achievement. To be eligible, a student must have a Bachelor’s Degree from a regionally-accredited college or university, with a cumulative GPA of 3.75 or above. The Master Ni Scholarship is awarded to students who have demonstrated exceptional leadership qualities as well as academic achievement. Both offer $1500 per year toward the cost of tuition.

Since the inception of the program, three outstanding new students have been awarded scholarships. What follows is a profile of one of these exceptional students, Kathy Divinsky.

KATHY DIVINSKY was awarded the Yo San scholarship in Spring 2006. Kathy was born in the Ukraine and immigrated to California when she was only two. She attended the University of California, Santa Barbara and graduated with degrees in Religious Studies and Russian language. Before pursuing her career in Chinese Medicine, she worked in marketing and copywriting. Less than a year ago, she was suffering from back pain and decided to try acupuncture, despite her fear of needles. Within the first fifteen minutes of the treatment she was hooked, and decided to pursue her studies in TCM. Yo San was a natural fit for her. "I really appreciate Yo San’s dedication to teaching students about the spiritual aspect of the medicine in addition to the actual science behind it," she says. She was also intrigued by the idea of working in the Learning Garden located at nearby Venice High School. Kathy has loved her Yo San experience so far and is impressed by the diversity of the community. Being a scholarship recipient has really helped boost her confidence as a student, especially in such a rigorous program as Yo San’s. For her future practice, Kathy envisions a setting that combines an acupuncture clinic, yoga studio, and tea shop, where patients can meet over healthy herbal concoctions.

Yo San Grads Post Another Perfect Score at the California Boards!

The results are in, and everyone is beaming in the corridors of Yo San University. For the second time in a row, 100% of our first-time exam takers at the California Acupuncture Licensing Exam passed with flying colors! Licenses, here we come! Clearly, Yo San is leading the TCM community in academic accomplishment. Congratulations to all and so many thanks to our exceptional faculty, led by Academic Dean Lawrence Lau.
March 26, as I looked around my third Yo San Commencement, I was struck by how much our community has grown. Our twenty-two newly minted graduates were surrounded, as usual, by families and friends. Recent alumni cheered their fellow classmates. Yo San’s academic and clinical faculty came to congratulate their students and wish them well, as did staff, Trustees, and our founders, the Ni Family. There was the usual mix of pride and excitement, tinged with sadness. One could feel the energy surrounding each graduate.

There was fresh energy too, as we were joined by some wonderful new friends and by old friends who hadn’t before shared in this joyous, annual Yo San rite of passage. I’d like to recognize a few of them.

Michael Woo, former Los Angeles City Councilman and current member of the Los Angeles City Planning Commission, delivered a thought-provoking Keynote Address about the traditional and the new in China. In August 2005, Mr. Woo had invited Yo San to participate in the 2nd Annual Chinatown Food Festival, to bring concepts of Chinese food and Traditional Chinese Medicine together to encourage a healthier lifestyle in the Los Angeles community.

Also on stage was Shane Burras, a 2000 graduate of Yo San, named 2005 Acupuncturist of the Year by the American Association of Oriental Medicine, and an authority on medical insurance. Shane has returned to Yo San to teach a series of Continuing Education classes.

Maria and Klaus Schoenberger, long-time and consistent benefactors of Yo San sat near the front. Maria has helped support one of her great passions, Yo San’s library. A few rows away sat Dr. Edwin L. Cooper, with his wife, Helene. Dr. Cooper is Professor of Neurobiology at UCLA’s David Geffen School of Medicine. As Founding Editor-in-Chief of eCAM, an Oxford University Press publication devoted to evidenced-based Complementary and Alternative Medicine, Dr. Cooper encourages members of our community to contribute to the growing body of literature about the effective practice of TCM.

Way at the back, I spied Mark Pracher, Yo San Trustee and grant writer, who helped us secure our $50,000, 2005 “Healthy Aging Initiative” grant from the Unihealth Foundation. Mark is a great contributor to Yo San’s fundraising efforts and is assisting with our applications for new grants.

As we congratulate our graduates, we are thankful to the growing number of people whom we count among Yo San’s friends.

— Ellen

I love Commencement.

With so many celebrations and ceremonies becoming jaded caricatures of themselves, the Commencement celebration remains one of the genuine watersheds in the life of every student. It is a day set aside to mark the completion of extraordinary accomplishments, while signaling the initiation into the next great phase in our lives. Friends and family go to extraordinary lengths to bear witness to, and show support for, the success of each graduate. During my many years in academic circles, I have found this experience to be universal.

As the Dean of Student Affairs and designated ‘event planner’ for Graduation 2006, it was important to me to be able to write my own speech to the graduates – not one that would be presented on the stage of St. Roberts Auditorium, but one that would be presented here, after graduation, in the pages of the publication that is their primary source of alumni information. But what would I say that had not been said before, with more brilliance and finesse? Would this graduation look and feel like the thousands of ceremonies that had preceded it? Invitations? Check. Programs? Check. Food? Check. Balloons? Check. Graduates? Check! You get the picture.

Graduation Day arrived and all was well. The flowers, food, guests and esteemed Guest Speakers arrived. The graduates suited up and prepared for their entry. Light music prepared the audience, and as the Graduates processed, I finally was able to release myself from the worry I had been containing. What I appreciated most caught me by surprise: the selfless generosity of so many participants.

First, the owner of the party store around the corner from Yo San donated an extra half dozen balloons to my order and offered congratulations to all. Then Mike Hulsey, fiancé of our Assistant Academic Dean Alexa Bradley, wrestled with two colossal vases of beautiful flowers that he had been able to obtain for us at a fraction of their true cost. Denise Cicuto, a professional photographer and current Yo San student, arrived early to start taking photographs, insisting that she would not accept payment for services to her school. Al Secunda, a professional flute player, waived his fee to make it possible for us to have two musicians at the event. Former Los Angeles Councilman Michael Woo arrived early, prepared with an important speech about the risks and rewards of China’s current growth, and how it would impact the future role of TCM. He asked for no fee, and didn’t even have time to eat the Red Velvet cupcake he was promised. Members of the Yo San Administration could have attended the event as ‘guests’, but instead, Shui Lan May, Daouia Amrir, Amy Xu, Alexa Bradley, and Marius Imfeld came to work. They were joined by Trustee Sum Yee Wang and former YSU Student Association President Suzy Sofrins. Without the help of these dedicated individuals I would have been completely overwhelmed.

Yes, the speeches were great. Yes, the leadership of this school made everyone feel valued and important. Yes, everyone looked majestic in their graduation attire. And the weather was perfect! But what I walked away with from the 2006 Commencement was the visceral appreciation of how the Yo San University Graduation Class of 2006 had bathed in the generosity of others. No one was asked, but many offered. And on that Sunday afternoon, each in their own way, they stepped forward to say “I am doing this because this school is special, and because you are special.” That is the message I need to share. It was, in the end, not at all like most graduations. ■
Yo San Provides Integrative Care for Chronic Pain

On March 29, 2006, Yo San participated in the dedication of Venice Family Clinic’s new Simms/Mann Health and Wellness Center. In his keynote address, Los Angeles Mayor Villaraigosa mentioned “acupuncture” at the top of his list of complementary healing modalities.

For seven years, Yo San interns have been providing free acupuncture to Venice Family Clinic’s indigent patients. Now what’s so exciting is that we have added a second weekly shift, participating in VFC’s new pilot Multidisciplinary Chronic Pain Clinic. Yo San’s interns work with the Clinic Directors, MD’s, and other healthcare practitioners to address the epidemic of chronic pain.

The newly endowed $3.5 million Simms/Mann Health and Wellness Center represents the first health, wellness, and integrative medicine treatment center offered at a free clinic in the U.S. Yo San University is proud to be part of VFC’s ground-breaking work.

In her public message, VFC CEO, Elizabeth Benson Forer said, “Integrative medicine values all aspects of a person’s health—mind, body, and spirit.” Practitioners of Traditional Chinese Medicine have done this for thousands of years. We at Yo San University share these values and are pleased to serve the healthcare needs of the greater Los Angeles community.

ThankYou

Thank you again to all of our generous donors who made our fundraising efforts in 2005 so successful. Your contributions enable us to provide free and low-cost treatments, train the next generation of healers, and become a vital community asset.

CLASS NOTES

FERRAN BLASCO (’05) and BROOKE PHILLIPS (’05) have relocated to Chapel Hill, NC with their daughter Arian. Ferran is in private practice, treating patients in a holistic physical therapy office. He mostly sees patients with chronic degenerative disorders using a combination of acupuncture, Chinese herbs, and European Biotherapeutic Drainage Therapy. Brooke has joined an acupuncture practice where she is focusing on infertility, pregnancy, and pediatrics. She works closely with the North Carolina Center for Reproductive Medicine incorporating acupuncture into western fertility treatments. She is also teaching prenatal yoga. Arian just celebrated her 2nd birthday!

MILES RED (’01), who practices in Beverly Hills, participated in the Ideas Festival in Aspen, an annual event sponsored by the Aspen Center for Integrative Health. The event featured Miles in a panel discussion on the role of TCM in the surg- ing Integrative Medicine model developing in the US. More info can be found on Miles’ website under “events” – http://www.tilomedical.com.

MARC RYAN (’02) reports, “After doing a couple of stints in the work-comp world in 2 Orthopedic surgeons’ offices, I landed a job doing acupuncture at The Sports Club LA in Beverly Hills and West LA (quite a contrast), focusing on orthopedics and internal medicine. Beginning March 31st I will join The UCLA Men’s Health Clinic with a urologist, an oncologist and a nutritionist. The focus of the clinic will be men’s health issues (prostate cancer prevention and treatment, BPH, sexual dysfunction and andropause). The most enlightening part of this experience has been the open mindedness of the MDs. They are quite interested in learning about what Chinese Medicine has to offer patients and I am quite eager to tell them (as you can well imagine).”

Staying In Touch

ALUMNI

Help us update the alumni directory on Yo San’s new website! If you would like to be listed, please send us your contact information and a brief biography.

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There is no denying that acupuncture “works.”

The scientific community, however, utilizes different criteria for establishing whether, and to what extent, acupuncture works. Research often begins with observing these clinical benefits, but moves quickly on to more structured investigation. How do scientists come up with conclusions, and how can we assess the quality of the research?

There are essentially two types of research: experimental studies (aka “clinical trials”) and observational studies. Experimental studies examine whether acupuncture works for treating a specific condition. In a clinical trial, individuals are randomized into treatment or control groups. Individuals receive “real” acupuncture if they are in the treatment group, and “sham” acupuncture if they are in the control group. What plagues researchers is this: “What is an appropriate treatment in an acupuncture study, and what is an appropriate control (or ‘sham’)?”

Research methods require standardized treatment and standardized control. All participants receiving “real” acupuncture must get the same treatment – the same set of points – even though real patients rarely receive this type of standardized treatment. The “sham” treatment often involves a simulation of acupuncture. Needles are placed very shallowly, or toothpicks are used. This is often done on locations that are not actual acupuncture points, or on points that are not appropriate for the condition. However, when acupuncture needles pierce the skin anywhere on the body, local micro-systemic changes occur, similar to “real” acupuncture effects. Consequently, it becomes difficult to tease out the real treatment effects from the more general effects that may be produced in the sham group. Despite these limitations, several recent studies have found beneficial effects of acupuncture beyond those of sham. A recent study published in the prestigious Annals of Internal Medicine, found significant improvement with acupuncture treatment of osteoarthritis of the knee compared to sham treatment or education (Berman et al., 2004; visit www.annals.org).

In the second type of research, an observational study (aka a “survey”), a researcher might ask: “Who gets acupuncture, how often do they go, what are they treated for, and how satisfied are they with their treatment?” The 2002 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) provided, for the first time, a national profile of Americans who use complementary and alternative medicine, including acupuncture. The answer to these questions, based on findings from my own research, will appear in my next column.

Dawn Upchurch, Ph.D., is Professor of Public Health at UCLA’s School of Public Health. Recently awarded a research career award from the National Institutes of Health, Professor Upchurch is studying TCM and will be conducting a clinical trial at Yo San’s Clinic. She is also a member of Yo San’s faculty.