

EMBARGOED UNTIL 9 AM EST ON FEBRUARY 5, 2025

York University students and graduate named finalists for the McCall MacBain Scholarships

Recognized for their leadership potential, York University students Mira Bhattacharya (BSc'25) and Nafanta Fadiga (BSc'25) as well as graduate Richard Wu (BSc'24) are finalists for the McCall MacBain Scholarships at McGill. The three finalists will travel to Montreal to attend final interviews in March, with travel expenses covered by the scholarship program.

The result of a landmark \$200-million gift, the McCall MacBain Scholarships are Canada's largest leadership-based scholarships for master's and professional studies. Each scholarship covers tuition and fees for an eligible degree, a living stipend of \$2,300 per month during academic terms, summer funding options, mentorship, coaching, a leadership curriculum, and access to the McCall MacBain House. A relocation grant is provided for scholars originating from outside of Montreal.

The three are among 52 Canadian finalists chosen from approximately 700 applicants after a first round of interviews. The selection process emphasizes holistic criteria such as character, community engagement, leadership potential, entrepreneurial spirit, academic strength, and intellectual curiosity.

Cognitive Science student **Mira Bhattacharya** co-founded and runs Disable the Difference, a non-profit organization that has mobilized 150+ volunteers to provide accessible remote programming for individuals with disabilities. Mira revived and leads York's Best Buddies chapter, facilitating inclusive recreational opportunities. She also leads her program's student association and volunteers at a centre for children with disabilities.

During an exchange year through the Killam Fellowship at Wellesley College and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Mira worked as a teacher at the college's child study centre and joined the equestrian team. She conducted research in cognitive neurophysiology, thanks to an NSERC Undergraduate Student Research Award, and recently assisted with participant recruitment and screening for a research study at Harvard Medical School.

Mira is applying for master's programs in psychology and speech-language pathology at McGill.

"I am humbled to be surrounded by so many inspiring individuals who are passionate about making a difference," said Mira. "Being a finalist for the McCall MacBain Scholarship is an incredible honour and opportunity to learn, contribute, and connect. Having worked towards this goal since the inception of the scholarship, it feels rewarding to see my goals materialize."

Nafanta Fadiga is studying Global Health at York while working as a bilingual talent and campus recruitment specialist at a multinational pharmaceutical company. She is passionate about sickle cell disease (SCD) research and currently volunteers with two SCD organizations. Her volunteer efforts include researching the role of international advocacy in improving SCD health outcomes and setting up an online hub to make clinical trials more accessible.

While pursuing her first bachelor's degree at Queen's University, Nafanta helped run the Black Premedical Association, led the World Sickle Cell Day proclamation in Kingston, and worked as a residence don. She has volunteered and worked at the University Health Network, a hospital network in Toronto, contributing to clinical research studies.

Nafanta is applying for medical school and medical science degrees at McGill. She has co-authored several research publications on SCD and hopes to continue contributing to research in this area.

"The application process encouraged deep reflection on my journey, values, and impact on others," said Nafanta. "It's incredibly meaningful to have my dedication to healthcare equity and community service recognized on this level."

Global Health graduate **Richard Wu** works as a clerical assistant at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto, supports his family as a caregiver, and volunteers as a patient and family advisor for Ontario Health. During his previous studies at the University of Waterloo, Richard led the student federation representing 34,000 undergraduates. In this role, he worked with the team to launch new student services and advocated for the university to adopt the Okanagan Charter for health and wellbeing. More recently, at York, he has volunteered with the Global and Environmental Health lab. He is working on a research study on housing insecurity, energy insecurity, and mental health in Ghana.

Richard is applying for master's programs in medical and health sciences at McGill.

"My time at York University has been incredibly transformative," said Richard. "The experiences I have had through the Global Health program have not only deepened my understanding of human health, but have provided me with the skills and confidence to tackle real-world challenges and contribute to positive change."

"We need more leaders who act with integrity, kindness, curiosity, and courage," said Dr. Marcy McCall MacBain, Chair of the McCall MacBain Scholarships at McGill. "We congratulate these students who have already distinguished themselves as the top candidates nationally and globally, and we thank the universities that endorsed them for this opportunity."

During their visit to Montreal, they will participate in interviews with leaders from academia, business, government, and the social sector. Up to 30 McCall MacBain Scholars will be selected after final interviews. Finalists not selected for the cohort will be eligible to receive \$10,000 or \$20,000 for their studies at McGill.

"We are grateful to the more than 300 senior leaders who contribute their time to the decision-making process," added Natasha Sawh, CEO of the McCall MacBain Scholarships at McGill. "The interview process allows students to reflect on their experiences and motivations, and we hope each one comes away from the process with a better understanding of their capacity to lead and to strengthen communities."

Applications will open in June 2025 for the 2026 cohort. More information about the McCall MacBain Scholarships can be found at mccallmacbainscholars.org.