

Diem Jennings - 2026 Scholarship Recipient

Tell me about your high school experience.

For high school, I transitioned from the Bronx to an all-girls private school on the Upper East Side – a change that taught me how to navigate new environments with confidence and a sense of humor. I joined the volleyball team, eventually working my way up to varsity and becoming team captain. I loved every second of it – even the early morning practices. I also competed on the speech and debate team, where I honed my ability to articulate complex ideas and argue passionately for causes I believe in. Recognizing the need for a dedicated space for students of color, I joined my school's affinity space, Women of Proud Heritage, and served as a co-leader in my senior year. Beyond school, I had some incredible opportunities to give back. In 2024, I traveled to our sister school in India to teach English – and I learned just as much Marathi from the students as they learned from me! I also spent a winter at the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, where I helped build beds and distribute food and resources to the Oglala Lakota community. I will never forget the feeling of hammering nails into wood at 14 years old, knowing that something as simple as a bed could make a real difference in someone's life.

What community service projects made an impact on you?

My school requires service for graduation, but somewhere along the way, it stopped being a requirement and started being something I genuinely love. Because I study Mandarin Chinese, I volunteered at a local food pantry, where I not only bagged groceries but was able to speak to some of the families in their native tongue. It is a small thing, but being able to say "hello" in someone's language can make the world feel a little warmer. Girl Scouting has been a constant thread throughout my life. I recently returned from the Girl Scout Convention, where I bridged to an adult – bittersweet after twelve years of cookies, campfires, and community service. As a Girl Scout, I organized a school supply drive for children in Nicaragua, cold-calling local businesses and pitching to companies like Dollar General. However, my favorite service project took place in St. Louis, Missouri, where we focused on food insecurity. We visited local pantries, community gardens, and farms to raise awareness about nutrition and food access, and then baked lasagna for local residents.

Tell me about the college or university you selected and why you thought it would be a good fit for you.

I will attend Middlebury College, where I plan to major in International Politics and Economics with a minor in Chinese. Roughly 75% of juniors study abroad, and I am eager to continue my Mandarin studies, having already placed out of the introductory level. I hope to return to Taiwan

through Middlebury's study abroad program. Beyond academics, Middlebury has a volleyball club, which I definitely plan to join!

What prompted you to apply for our scholarship?

I was inspired to apply for this scholarship by my mother, Ms. Francis, a member of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., initiated through Alpha Chapter at Howard University. I strive to embody the sorority's principles – scholarship, service, sisterly love, and finer womanhood – in my own life. My mom has always been a role model for me, and knowing she walked this path before me makes me feel like I can walk it too. This scholarship represents not only financial support but also recognition of the values I hold dear: academic excellence, community engagement, and a commitment to lifting others up. I am honored to be considered and would be proud to carry on the legacy of service that my mother and Zeta Phi Beta represent.

What advice would you give to incoming high school seniors?

Start your college research in the summer. Do not wait until classes start! Trust me, I learned this the hard way. Do not slack off your senior year! Start strong and finish strong. Your future self will thank you. Also, do not be afraid to ask for help, whether it is from teachers, counselors, or older students who have been through the process. And remember, the college search is not just about finding a school that wants you – it is about finding a school that feels like home. Take your time, trust your gut, and know that everything will work out the way it is supposed to.