



The Cook Family Foundation

Fall **2025**

PURPOSE

Serving as both a resource for the community and a catalyst for positive change.

OUR VALUES

Have Integrity
Be Inclusive
Make True Impact

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Cook Family Foundation Co-Executive Director Tom Cook (right) and University of Michigan's Alicia Marting (left) stand with scholarship winners (left to right) Jack Challender, Truman Danek, and Emily Rathka. Photo Credit: David Lorne Photographic

Our Legacy of Academic Philanthropy Continues with More than Just Financial Support

Excitement is certainly in the air at The Cook Family Foundation's office this time of year, as fifty-three of the most accomplished University of Michigan scholarship awardees from the Shiawassee region head off to start their collegiate experience. Twenty-nine will be headed to UM-Flint and twenty-four to UM-Ann Arbor.

Emily Rathka is the 2025 **Bruce and Jacqueline Cook Scholarship** winner. This highly competitive scholarship, recently endowed after the passing of our benefactors, provides four years of undergraduate tuition to UM-Ann Arbor. Emily is the daughter of Dan and Kate Rathka and was valedictorian of her class at Laingsburg High School. She is enrolled in UM-Ann Arbor's School of Nursing with plans to earn a BSN, with a minor in Global Health. Her long-term goal is to earn a Master's or Doctorate to become a nurse practitioner to work in international health in foreign and/or war-torn countries.

Two other students were awarded four-year scholarships, each worth \$20,000.

Jack Challender from Corunna High School and **Truman Danek** from Chesaning High School were awarded the University of Michigan's **Donald Cook Scholarship** to attend the College of Literature, Science and the Arts. Truman plans to study psychology and, perhaps, one day, receive a doctorate in that field. Jack will study political science and hopes to continue on to pursue a law degree.

On Their Way to Ann Arbor

This fall, 24 of the Leaders and Best from nine area high schools are enrolled at UM-Ann Arbor.

Byron

Zerik Crawford
Emma Davis

Chesaning

Truman Danek
Jeffrey Luce
Joslyn McGough
Skylar Wissinger

Corunna

Jack Challenger
Logan Fox
Laurie Platner*
Taylor Throne
Dayne Zeeman

Durand

Timothy Halleaux

Laingsburg

Evelyn Logghe
Mirabella Carolan
Emily Rathka

Morrice

Peyton Lamb

Ovid-Elsie

Riley Clark

Owosso

Charles Agnew
Owen Feldpausch
Nicholas McCurdy
Matthew Shattuck

Perry

Brooklynn Bentley
Jocelyn Hessling
Annabelle Kue**

* 2023 Graduate
** 2024 Graduate



University of Michigan's Cook Scholars at U-M Program Manager, Jeri Preston (right) with Cook Family Foundation's Tom Cook and part of the current University of Michigan executive board of the student-led Shiawassee Students at U-M (SSUM)

New Program Launches: The Cook Scholars at U-M

The Cook Family Foundation is deepening its commitment to supporting Shiawassee area students to gain a world-class education. This comes in the form of a new initiative at UM-Ann Arbor: the Cook Scholars at U-M.

With new three-year funding from the Cook Family Foundation, **Jeri Preston**, Program Manager, will guide scholarship recipients to specific help for any of their individual needs on campus. This program is focused on providing access to any on-campus support resources: from getting connected to counseling and psychological services, finding undergraduate research opportunities, connecting to academic support resources, to joining student extracurricular organizations. The dedicated professional support staff will assist Shiawassee students in navigating campus and help build a network of trust for students throughout their time at Michigan.

Also new this year in Ann Arbor is a student-run group called "Shiawassee Students at the University of Michigan." This group, initiated by current Shiawassee students on campus, has as its mission "to create an environment fostering new communities, outreach, and giving back to the community from which we came. Through events and participation in outreach, we aim to foster new communities here on campus. Through outreach and giving back, we can further support the Shiawassee Students and Cook Family's mission of seeing students from Shiawassee County succeed in secondary education."

To join the group, or to learn more, visit www.instagram.com/shiawasseeestudentsum

On Their Way to Flint

This year, 29 students from these seven area schools are starting their U-M education in Flint.

Byron

Hannah Volkening

Corunna

Lillian Evans*
Paul Galesk
Stori Jenkins
Aidan Lavery
Noah Mckinney

Durand

Connor Burke
Malerie Freese
Madeline Frelich***
Arianna Hemmert
Elisha Lee
Aidan Nazarian***
Landen Schneider-Janes
Alison Walter
Andrew Weaver
Sebastian Wells

Morrice

Payton Chapko
Alexis Lademann

New Lothrop

Rylee Elkins

Owosso

Zeriah Barnhill
Jason Beckwith
Addison Collard
Allyson LaMay***
Elizabeth McCroan
Noah Norman**
Olivia Scrimger

Perry

Spencer Griffith
Caleb Knickerbocker
Jordyn Pangborn

* 2021 Graduate
** 2023 Graduate
*** 2024 Graduate

Shiawassee Scholars - Preparing Eighth Graders For What Lies Ahead



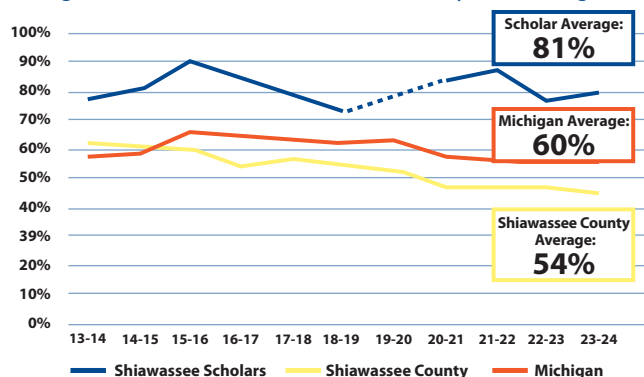
In 1999, the Cook Family Foundation started a partnership with the Shiawassee Regional Education Service District (SRES D) to provide academically talented high school students the opportunities, resources and support to reach their full potential.

Since then, more than 1,200 eighth graders from eight area schools have been recognized as Shiawassee Scholars (see details of this program in the next article on this page).

A new report documents the success of the program.

81% of the Shiawassee Scholars have enrolled in college, as compared to 54% of their peers. Impressively, most of them are attending prestigious four-year universities.

College Enrollment Rate within 6 Months, by Graduating Cohort



Notes: Data for Shiawassee County and Michigan come from MI School Data. Data for Scholars in 2019-20 is excluded and represented by the dashed line.

Getting into a good college, often with a scholarship, is the first step. The report, compiled by the Center for Education Design, Evaluation, and Research at the University of Michigan, also shows that Shiawassee Scholars do well at college, getting similar grades, and graduating at rates comparable to other college students.

“Working with **Bruce Cook** three decades ago, we knew that Shiawassee students were as smart as kids from anywhere,” said Tom Cook. “But they lacked the opportunities, support, and guidance to attend the best colleges.” Discussions with parents, counselors, and administrators with the SRES D led to the creation of the Shiawassee Scholars program in 1999 with funding from the Cook Family Foundation.

“We knew in our hearts we were impacting the lives of these students from their comments and graduations over the decades,” said SRES D Superintendent **Dave Schulte**. *“It’s great to see our shared endeavor verified by this research.”*

What makes the program successful? Researchers conducted a number of focus groups with current and former Shiawassee Scholars, and they identified the following factors: encouragement of teachers, help with the logistics of education such as college applications, test preparation, scholarships to summer college programs, an overnight visit to the University of Michigan at the start of high school, and the influence of other and previous Shiawassee Scholars.

According to the report, “the near-peer interactions between current and former scholars also shapes expectancy and task value.” In other words, guidance and advice from college students helps Shiawassee Scholars see that they, too, can attend a four-year university and convinces them of the benefit of the work necessary to achieve academic success.

In a rural county, it can sometimes be difficult for talented students to see themselves as college students, even with the encouragement of parents and teachers. The Shiawassee Scholars program provides both motivation and mechanics to make the most of high school, apply for admission and scholarships to prestigious universities, and then succeed. As one former scholar explained, the Shiawassee Scholars program *“was one of the first rungs... in a long ladder of achievement.”* (Visit CookFamilyFoundation.org or scan the code to read the full report.)



About the Shiawassee Scholars

How To Become A Shiawassee Scholar? This year, the County’s top eighth grade students are identified by their PSAT (Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test) scores. These top achievers are invited into the Shiawassee Scholar program.

What Do Shiawassee Scholars Do? A three-day college campus trip and several other events help the Scholars explore collegiate opportunities after high school.

Who Are This Year’s Shiawassee Scholars? The newest group of Shiawassee Scholars (from among eight Shiawassee County schools) will be recognized at a reception in September. Visit The Cook Family Foundation website to see the most up-to-date information.

For more information about Shiawassee Scholars, contact Kelsee Gewirtz at the SRES D at 989.743.3471 ext. 2602 or email her at gewirtz@sresd.org



The
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Our Legacy of Academic Philanthropy Continues
with More than Just Financial Support

Cook Scholars at University of Michigan

Shiawassee Scholars Program

Where Are They Now?



Look for Us
on Facebook
and Instagram!

“Without heroes, we are all plain people and don’t know how far we can go.” – Bernard Malamud

Where Are They Now?

The only thing that excites those of us at the Cook Family Foundation more than supporting students on their way to college is what happens to them AFTER they take those first steps... and their subsequent journey through life. We’ve recently begun a series of updates on students the Foundation has supported since its inception called ***Where Are They Now?***... (visit <https://www.cookfamilyfoundation.org/scholarships/where-are-they-now/>)

In this newsletter issue, we’re giving a brief update on **Elizabeth Tolrud**, the 2021 Bruce and Jacqueline Cook Scholarship winner. As a U-M triple-major in Molecular, Cellular, & Developmental Biology; Ecology, Evolution, & Biodiversity; and Program in the Environment, she maintained a strong commitment to environmental, justice-based pursuits. An abbreviated list of her extracurricular activities include: serving as co-president of the U-M Chapter of Citizens’ Climate Lobby, co-founder of the Student Carbon Neutrality Network (SCANN), Circular Economy Engagement Advisor for the City of Ann Arbor, and team member of the U-M Student Sustainability Coalition.

This past semester, she completed her senior thesis titled *Impacts of Diethyl Phthalate and Monoethyl Phthalate During Neural Differentiation* for which she received high honors. Most recently, she was granted the Fulbright award for research and is travelling to Norway – where she will be working to develop a new protocol to detect and analyze microplastics in environmental samples, especially in sea ice.



If you are a student who has been associated with the Cook Family Foundation, no matter where you are now or how long it has been since you donned a Wolverine cap and gown, we’d love to hear from you.

Fill out this form to share your story with us!

