

School of General Studies, Columbia University

Vidda Foundation Scholars 2025 - 2026

Luiza Guimaraes Gomes

I dropped out of law school in Brazil and came to the U.S. to work as an au pair. I discovered my passion for storytelling and this led me to a major in Film & Media Studies at GS. I am a social media coordinator for COMBO, a project at Columbia's medical school that studies the effect of Covid on mothers and infants. Looking ahead, I plan to pursue a graduate degree in television production. I aim to bring to the medium my unique perspective as an Afro-Brazilian immigrant.

Major:	Film and Media Studies
Standing:	Junior
GPA:	3.91
Total Scholarship:	\$38,350
Vidda Portion:	13,000
GS Portion:	25,350

Joshua Kalish

I used to work in consulting and finance. I returned to school in order to pursue a more fulfilling career in scientific research. At GS, I am a physics major, an astronomy researcher, and a volunteer math teacher at a local elementary school. I plan to enter a PhD program after I graduate around Spring 2027.

Major:	Physics
Standing:	Senior
GPA:	3.94
Total Scholarship:	\$13,000
Vidda Portion:	13,000
GS Portion:	0

Mary Markovitz

I grew up in the woods of East Hampton, Connecticut. My parents – my mother an immigrant, and my father disabled – instilled in me the value of work ethic and education. I always had a passion for dance, and moved to New York directly following high school. I attended Hunter College as a member of the Muse Scholar Honors Cohort, but left to attend the conservatory of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. Eventually, I returned to academia, finding a home at the School of General Studies. I have balanced my studies with my blossoming dance career, taking the occasional leave to pursue professional opportunities that require me to travel. Back once more at GS, I am majoring in American Studies. I hope to graduate in Spring 2027.

Major:	American Studies
Standing:	Junior
GPA:	3.90
Total Scholarship:	\$38,500
Vidda Portion:	13,000
GS Portion:	25,500

Nicole Pena

I came to the School of General Studies at Columbia University with a deep commitment to finishing my education. I am majoring in Human Rights with a specialization in History. Balancing full-time work with part-time studies means I often find myself studying late into the night or carving out time between professional obligations. It hasn't been easy, but the discipline and determination it takes to sustain both has sharpened my focus and deepened my appreciation for the opportunity to learn. I could not be on this journey without the generous scholarships I have received. I am determined to honor the Vidda Foundation's investment in me by graduating with distinction and serving my community. I hope to attend law school and have a career rooted in policy reform. Every class, every semester, brings me closer to that goal. I've never taken a moment of it for granted.

Major:	Human Rights
Standing:	Senior
GPA:	4.09
Total Scholarship:	\$15,650
Vidda Portion:	13,000
GS Portion:	2,650

Iakov Shulepov

I grew up in Russia. By the end of my high school career, I recognized that I had two separate passions: music and computer science. After attending a summer program at the Boston Conservatory, I made up my mind to pursue my first bachelor's there. While I was studying and practicing on the Fenway, Russia attacked Ukraine. My parents were suddenly jobless and I faced enlistment should I return. I therefore applied to GS for a second B.A. in computer science. Here I have made a new academic and personal home. With the support of the Vidda Foundation, I hope to graduate in 2026.

Major:	Computer Science
Standing:	Junior
GPA:	3.80
Total Scholarship:	\$28,250
Vidda Portion:	13,000
GS Portion:	15,250

Vidda Foundation Scholars
2024 - 2025

Ye Jin Cho

I am a non-binary, first-generation immigrant, and nontraditional student. Choosing Columbia GS was the best academic decision I could make – both because of the school's rigorous curriculum and because it offers the diversity that suits my needs. As a professional musician and a lifelong learner, I have been able to use the Film and Media major at GS to improve my work. I am currently working on a multimedia project that aims to connect my queer identity and experience as an immigrant. The knowledge and skills I have gained here have equipped me to apply theoretical frameworks to the stories I want to tell, uniting different mediums and disciplines. I believe my senior year at Columbia GS will enrich me further as a student and a creator.

Major:	Film and Media Studies
Standing:	Senior
GPA:	4.01
Total Scholarship:	\$14,750
Vidda Portion:	13,000
GS Portion:	1,750

Milena Hartog

I trained at a ballet academy in the Netherlands, then spent a decade working with classical and contemporary dance companies here in the States. My world revolved around the art form; it provided me with a community and a form of escape through tough times. I yearned for further education; GS allowed me to balance my career with my academic goals. I am majoring in Medical Humanities as I am fascinated by the mind-body connection. My coursework has opened my eyes to different ways of approaching mental and physical disorders. My hope is to now forge pathways for more effective healthcare and contribute to a more understanding society.

Major:	Medical Humanities
Standing:	Junior
GPA:	4.07
Total Scholarship:	\$27,900
Vidda Portion:	13,000
GS Portion:	14,900

Olivia La Rue

At twenty, I experienced something that forced me to take some time off of college to handle. I needed to put my health before my studies. However, once that was handled, I was reminded of a beloved high school teacher of mine who is an alumna of General Studies. I remembered the way she spoke of her time at Columbia, and how grateful she was to have the chance to be a student in such an institution. Now, here I am, following in her footsteps. I am currently majoring in psychology, with a dream to pursue a career in behavioral science research. GS lets me learn from the best in the field and take part in hands-on research. I have gained skills working in a lab that I never imagined I could acquire as an undergraduate. I have also had the opportunity to work with Columbia's America Reads and Counts program, assisting elementary school teachers in the area. I have always loved working with children, and it has been especially rewarding to pay my education forward. In the future, I hope to use all of these skills as I continue on to a doctoral program and a career in academia.

Major:	Psychology
Standing:	Senior
GPA:	4.04
Total Scholarship:	\$30,100
Vidda Portion:	13,000
GS Portion:	17,100

Jesper Norgaard

During the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 I found myself considering how I would continue supporting myself financially. I was a photographer, growing older, in an industry that is rapidly changing. I was

enjoying it less and less. I decided that I wanted to contribute to other people's well-being by pursuing a career in mental health. I came to Columbia University GS to do that. Over the past two years, I have worked at Religious Life and Community Impact at Columbia. I have also volunteered as a classroom assistant at a local public school in Harlem. In February of 2024 I started working as a volunteer with Columbia's Crisis Text Line, which has given me valuable experience with people in need of immediate help. I have found personal success in Columbia academia, earning a spot on the Dean's List for several semesters, being inducted to the GS Honor Society, and, just recently, into the Psi Chi Psychology Society at Columbia. I aim to apply for a masters degree in mental health at Teachers College for the 2025-26 academic year.

Major:	Psychology
Standing:	Senior
GPA:	3.93
Total Scholarship:	\$36,200
Vidda Portion:	13,000
GS Portion:	23,200

Lara-Nour Walton

I am Lara-Nour Walton. My first name has one foot in the West and one in the East. I was drawn to the School of General Studies because of my hybridity. I wanted a chance to explore my Egyptian roots at Sciences Po's Middle East and North African campus while experiencing the American education system as a History student at Columbia. I am also an aspiring reporter who believes that journalism should be an avenue for holding authority accountable. At Columbia I am the deputy editor for Spectator, in charge of podcasting and audio. At Sciences Po I was editor-in-chief of the Menton Times. This summer I will be interning at the Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia.

Major:	History
Standing:	Senior
GPA:	4.08
Total Scholarship:	\$27,000
Vidda Portion:	13,000
GS Portion:	14,000

