

Thirty students from 10 countries picked for first global cohort of McCall MacBain scholars

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The dormitories at American University in Cairo were filled with cheering when mechanical engineering student Reem Mahmoud announced that she was named a McCall MacBain scholar and will get to study at Canada's McGill University.

Ms. Mahmoud grew up in Giza, Egypt, where underage marriages are common and the pursuit of undergraduate education is not a choice for many women. But with the encouragement of her mother, Ms. Mahmoud entered American University on a merit scholarship. And when it came to her choice of major, she again made an unusual decision for women in her hometown – STEM (science, technology, engineering and math).

"It was a challenge all the way from getting out of my hometown to pursuing undergraduate education and now to actually pursuing mechanical engineering," she said in an interview.

Ms. Mahmoud is among 30 students from 10 countries that form the first global cohort of McCall MacBain scholars who will study at McGill. The scholarships, designed to encourage new leaders, are the result of a landmark \$200-million gift in 2019 from John and Marcy McCall MacBain.

With the McCall-MacBain scholarship and the opportunity to pursue a masters degree at McGill, Ms. Mahmoud aims to work in Canadian industry, and eventually, help women in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

"And afterwards, I think I'll be getting back to the MENA Region and establishing some sort of a venture that provides solutions that are necessary for the region and at the same time that are suitable for the economic circumstances of the region."

Students and graduates from more than 1,200 universities applied for the McCall MacBain scholarships in this first year of global admissions. More than 280 community leaders volunteered their time to review applications and interview 242 students. From this group, 88 were invited to a final round of interviews which took place in Montreal in March.

"Our committees were delighted to receive great interest from all corners of the world," said Natasha Sawh, dean of the McCall MacBain scholarships at McGill. "Our volunteers looked not only for academic strength, but for leadership qualities like integrity, kindness, grit, and an ability to motivate a team to address tough challenges."

For Clèche Kokolo, the scholarship means one thing: community. "It took a community to get me where I am today, and now through this scholarship, I get to expand my community as I embark on a



Left: Reem Mahmoud, who grew up in Giza, Egypt, aims to work in Canadian industry and eventually help women in the Middle East and North Africa.

Centre: Clèche Kokolo, who grew up in Manitoba, wants to study law at McGill in both English and French after seeing barriers in her community for those seeking access to French legal services.

Right: Mohit Kumar, who is from Firozabad, India, has been working to improve literacy in his community through his project known as Sarathi: The Guide.

new journey where I will continue giving back to my community."

Ms. Kokolo is a University of Manitoba student senator, and is working to launch a mentorship program to make student leadership roles more accessible. She was named one of Canada's Top 100 Black Women to Watch for her community work in 2022.

Ms. Kokolo wants to study law at McGill in both English and French because as someone who grew up in Manitoba, she saw barriers in her community for those seeking access to French legal services.

Through her studies, she hopes to continue to advocate for social justice and equity, so that the next generation of Black women see themselves represented in the legal profession and feel empowered to pursue their own education in the field.

Another scholarship recipient, Mohit Kumar, from Firozabad, India, has been working to improve literacy in his community through his project known as Sarathi: The Guide. Since 2019, he has expanded and mobilized 45 volunteers to support 850 students in 10 villages.

But his journey from studying in a gov-

ernment primary school to now becoming a McGill scholar hasn't been smooth sailing. Mr. Kumar said the switch from speak-

ing in his mother tongue in primary school to English in university was challenging. He said there was also a "sense of missing guidance" in a conventional education system like India's – where a career in STEM remains the goal of most. This is something he wishes to change with his education in Canada.

When you have good grades, the push is for you to study biology or math. "That happened with me. But I was like, 'I'm fine with humanities,' I love to read about it. I'm a history enthusiast," he said. "You have to think beyond the box. And when you're taking that decision, that's a big decision."

With the opportunity to study education at McGill, Mr. Kumar wants to give back to society by focusing on two things: quality education and equitable opportunities.

"I would really love to contribute, whether it's professionally or even in my personal capacity," he said. "This is the one thing I'm looking forward to on a larger scale."

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NATASHA SAWH
DEAN, McCALL MacBAIN
SCHOLARSHIPS