

THE CHARLOTTE W. NEWCOMBE FOUNDATION

What 2009-10 student letters tell us: The impact of Newcombe Scholarships on students with disabilities

Each year, hundreds of students write to the Newcombe Foundation offering individual thanks for scholarship support. In fact, the Foundation received 377 letters from Newcombe Scholars in 2009-10, including eighty-eight letters from recipients in the Scholarships for Students with Disabilities program. We value the stories these letters tell and enjoy hearing the authentic voices of each of these deserving students.

In 2010, we decided to undertake an in-depth study of these letters in an effort to document what Newcombe Scholars tell us about how receipt of this scholarship impacted their personal and academic lives. Although every student writer, both mature women and students with disabilities, comments about the financial assistance they received, the letters contain twice as many comments about the personal benefits triggered by receipt of the scholarship. This support – in the form of encouragement, recognition, and affirmation – is a source of motivation for these students to work hard and to continue on their path to earning degrees.

The eighty-eight letters received from the 215 students with disabilities who benefitted from Newcombe Scholarships in 2009-10 contain 102 comments (of 289 comments identified and counted) about the specific **financial benefits** provided by the Newcombe Scholarship. From those letters:

- One-half of scholarship recipients were grateful that general tuition needs were met through the scholarship.
- Over forty percent of recipients state that the Newcombe Scholarship provided the means to access disability-related assistance.
- Twelve percent of the letters mention that the Newcombe Scholarship was essential in allowing recipients to remain in school.
- Eight percent comment that because of the Newcombe Scholarship, students were more able to focus on academics and/or health.

Within the 88 letters, there are 187 comments (of the 289 comments identified and counted) that refer to the **personal and emotional support** enjoyed upon receipt of a Newcombe Scholarship. From those recipients:

- Over forty percent of writers mention the pride in achievement brought by this scholarship; this often translated into increased motivation to do well.
- One-third of writers said that they felt honored by the scholarship award.
- Twenty-three percent mention that being awarded this scholarship was an affirmation of the ability of people with disabilities to achieve.
- Twenty-eight percent claim that receipt of the scholarship increased their confidence in their ability to earn their degrees.
- Over thirty percent of writers claim that receipt of the scholarship provided them an incentive to “give back” to their communities and/or to help other people with disabilities.
- Twelve percent of letters use the word “dream” when speaking of a lifelong goal of earning a college degree. The Newcombe Scholarship is seen as instrumental in opening doors to reach that dream.
- Forty-four percent of writers say that the Newcombe Scholarship enabled them to pursue a rewarding career, allowing them to become independent, productive, and valued members of a community.

What is most heartwarming about the vast majority of letters is their authenticity. Together, the unique expressions of these individuals convey a sincere mosaic of gratitude combined with affirmation, inspiration, and commitment to succeed.

The complete 17-page report can be downloaded via the Newcombe website section titled “Information for currently funded institutions” at http://www.newcombefoundation.org/current_swd.html. The report, *What Student Letters Tell Us: The Impact of 2009-10 Newcombe Scholarships on Mature Women Students and Students with Disabilities*, includes data and many excerpts from letters received from recipients both in the Scholarships for Mature Women program and the Scholarships for Students with Disabilities program.