



Pete Ricketts
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EIGHT NEBRASKA STUDENTS NAMED NATIONAL HISPANIC SCHOLAR

LINCOLN – The National Hispanic Recognition Program has bestowed eight Nebraskan high school graduating seniors with the title of National Hispanic Scholar making them eight of 5,000 Latino students nationwide to receive this honor.

To qualify, the students had to have taken the Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT) in October of their junior year, be at least one-quarter Hispanic/Latino, be an American citizen or permanent resident, achieve the minimum required PSAT/NMSQT cutoff score and have a grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or higher on a 4.0 scale. The PSAT/NMSQT is a standardized test administered by the College Board that provides firsthand practice for the SAT Reasoning Test by measuring critical reading skills, writing skills and mathematical problem-solving skills.

William Francisco Calderon of Bennington

William Calderon, 17, graduated with a 3.97 GPA placing him near the top of his class at Brownell-Talbot High School in Omaha where he commutes from nearby Bennington.

William said he is honored to be a National Hispanic Scholar.

“I was especially excited to learn of the award because it was one of the first things senior year that showed my hard work in school paying off,” said William. “My great-grandparents immigrated to California from Mexico. They knew minimal English and worked long, laborious hours for a living in the fields, as did my grandparents during their childhood. They were determined to make a better life in America not necessarily for themselves, but for their kids, grandchildren, and so on. Just a few generations later, I have incredible academic opportunities laid before me thanks in large part to my relatives’ refusal to accept their lives as permanent and unchanging. I aim to honor their hard work in the fields with equally hard work in the classroom.”



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At Talbot, he was active in athletics earning his Varsity letter in Basketball 2010-12, Baseball 2011-12, and Band 2011-12. In 2011, he was Class B Honorable Mention for Baseball and an Academic All-State for winter sports 2010-12.

He was a member of Talbott's National Honor Society all four years serving as Vice-President in 2011 and President in 2012. In Student Government he served as Treasurer all four years and was also named a National Merit Commended Scholar.

Keeping up his athletic activities while maintaining high academic standards would become an obstacle to William.

"Before I learned better time management skills second semester, my grades started slipping. My parents got me back on track. We have a strong sense of family in my home, and they encouraged me and got me all the help I needed to pull myself and my grades together before the semester ended. I started going to bed on time, managing my time more efficiently, and learned the humility required to ask for help when I needed it. I am very grateful for my parents and their sticking with me during that tough, busy time, and I have learned and grown a lot as a student and as a young man since then," he said.

William is the son of Arturo and Valerie Calderon. He will attend Mississippi State University in Starkville, Miss. on the university's Provost Scholarship worth \$81,650 and the Bagley College of Engineering Excellence Scholarship of \$12,000. He plans to pursue a degree in Chemical Engineering and continue his education into earning a Ph.D. in Chemical Engineering. He would like to research and pursue alternative energy development as an engineer.

"The first two years of high school provide the foundation for your habits as an upperclassman," said William. "Classes get harder junior year, and if you work hard the two years before it and challenge yourself to be on time to class and finish your work on time as well, you will be prepared for when free time is more limited as you get older. Oftentimes, after a late basketball or baseball practice, I would be too tired to be productive on any homework I had. Knowing this, instead of napping or gaming during my free periods at school, I worked up the motivation to instead get started on my homework so that I could get home and rest afterward. Rest is crucially important, since losing sleep slows you down throughout the week, gradually making you behind on your work. I learned to budget my time well in high school so that I was always rested enough to take on each new day."

Jonathan R. Deemer of Lincoln



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Jonathan R. Deemer, 18, graduated fourth in his class from Lincoln's College View Academy this month with a 3.94 GPA.

"It's a great honor," said Jonathan. "I'm extremely proud to call myself a National Hispanic Scholar."

Jonathan is the son of Gary and Lisette Deemer. He can trace his roots to Cuba through his maternal family.

"Both of my mom's parents were born in Cuba but emigrated to the U.S. when Castro came to power. My dad is white," said Jonathan. "Most of my Hispanic family lives out of town, but whenever I see them, it feels like home. I'm proud of my Hispanic heritage."

His academic accomplishments include scoring a 34 on the ACT; a perfect score on the ACT is a 36 and the national average score among high school students is 20. He is also on the school's Honor Roll and Principal List.

His involvement with student organizations include being a member of his school's National Honor Society serving as President and Pastor, he was also involved in Class Leadership where he was a Class Representative and the Student Association, of which he served as his senior class President and Public Relations officer.

Among his athletic accomplishments is being named an Academic All-State recipient, students make Academic All-State by having a high GPA and significantly contributing to their athletic team. Jonathan was named an Academic All-State recipient six times. He was also on the Second Team All-Conference Basketball and is an All-State Tennis Honorable Mention.

"My studying habits were simply to work whenever possible. The many activities I was in involved in taught me how to efficiently manage my time," he said.

Jonathan will be attending the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado, a prestigious military academy that does not charge tuition or fees because military academies do not charge for their education; stipends are provided because the military considers their students as an investment.

However, the U.S. Air Force Academy has strict admission policies and leadership, academic, and medical standards. To attend the U.S. Air Force Academy, a student must be an American citizen, unmarried with no dependents, be of good moral character, and be between the ages of



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17 and 23 at the year of entry. In addition to these standards, a student must receive a nomination to the Academy from their U.S. Senator or U.S. Representative.

Jonathan was one of 17 students to have received a military academy nomination from Congressman Jeff Fortenberry, securing his acceptance to the U.S. Air Force Academy. He plans to major in political science at the Academy and would like to work with the U.S. Air Force Combat Rescue.

He has advice for underclassmen:

“Don’t let your grades slip early. My GPA dropped when I was an underclassman because of indifference. Choose to work hard. It may be easier for some, but success is always a choice.”

Cristobal Garcia of Omaha

Cristobal Garcia, 18, graduated Salutatorian from the Omaha Central High School class of 2015.

Cristobal is a member of the National Honor Society and the school’s Latino Leaders student organization. Among his achievements are receiving the Central High School Top Ten Percent Distinguished Scholars Award, the Latino Leaders Academic Achievement Award and being named a Purple Feather Honoree, which is a title given to students who have earned a cumulative GPA of 3.5 or higher throughout their high school career.

In addition, Cristobal also graduated under the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program meaning that he has an internationally recognized diploma. Considering his hard work, it is no surprise he graduated Salutatorian with a 4.8654 GPA on a 5.0 scale.

“Throughout high school I cultivated meticulous study habits, which enabled me to enjoy academic success,” said Cristobal. “As I progressed through the first semesters of my studies, I came to appreciate the importance of incorporating efficient time management, organization, and repetition into my study habits. The resulting study habits I honed are best characterized as methodical, tenacious, and disciplined.”

Being a National Hispanic Scholar is another achievement and a title that makes him want to work harder.

“Being named a National Hispanic Scholar has validated my effort and has further invigorated my academic drive,” said Cristobal. “It is an honor to be among the nation’s most academically



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outstanding Hispanic students. It is an important accomplishment, which I consider to be one of my foremost scholastic distinctions.”

Garcia credits his parents, Jorge Garcia and Olivia Valladares, for instilling a deep pride in his Mexican heritage.

“I was born to Mexican parents and am descended from a long line of Mestizos. Since childhood, my parents have instilled in me the many aspects of traditional Mexican culture. As a result, my Mexican heritage is a fundamental, if not the most important, aspect of my persona. I am proud of and fascinated by it. For these reasons, I carry it with me wherever I go and champion it enthusiastically,” he said.

After all he has accomplished, he recommends students to look at school as a key to success.

“It is imperative to find purpose in academics,” advises Cristobal. “This purpose serves as a lighthouse, guiding one through the harsh obstacles which encumber all students. Additionally, realizing the importance of academics and adopting an appropriately diligent mindset is key to attaining success. Nonetheless, one must seek a healthy balance between scholastic endeavors and extra-academic existence.”

He has received several scholarships including the QuestBridge National College Match Scholarship to Northwestern University, the Magis Award from Creighton University, the UNL Chancellor’s Scholarship, and the Central High School Foundation’s Arthur L., CHS 1914, and Genevieve K. Loomis Endowment Scholarship.

He will attend Northwestern University, a private university in Evanston, Ill., where he will major in Computer Science with the goal of becoming a Computer Software Engineer.

Brady Wilkerson of Humboldt

Brady Wilkerson, 17, has been on the Honor Roll for all his four years at Humboldt-Table Rock-Steinauer (HTRS) High School in Humboldt, Neb. As a result, he graduated sixth in his class with a 3.93 GPA.

He has also been awarded the Nebraska Pioneer Conference Academic All-Conference Award and the Southeast Nebraska Academic Excellence Award for his high ACT scores. Nationally, he has earned the President’s Award for Educational Excellence from the U.S. Dept. of Education for his academic achievements.



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As a student, Brady was an officer in his schools' Table Rock Christian Youth Group as Treasurer from 2013-14, and became President his senior year. He was a member of his school's National Honor Society, Quiz Bowl, Mock Trial, Academic Decathlon, One Act Play, the Family, Career & Community Leaders of America HTRS Chapter, HTRS STARS Leadership, and was a HTRS Youth Mentor.

Brady is unique in that he is both a National Hispanic Scholar and a National Achievement Finalist, which is a title recognizing Black American high school students with high PSAT/NMSQT scores.

"I was pretty excited when I found out, and can honestly say I am still excited. I remember doing a lot of research as to what being named a National Hispanic Scholar meant when it comes to my education. It has definitely helped open doors when it comes to college opportunities," said Brady. "My Hispanic heritage comes from my father's side of the family; my great-grandmother came to the United States from Mexico before marrying my great-grandfather. From my mother's side, I have both African-American and Belgian roots. I feel like it's always been a positive influence in my life. My grandfather and father do their very best to share memories of her and our culture with my sister and I."

Thanks to his hard work and achievements, he has received the following scholarships: Silas P. and Catherine C. Gist Scholarship, UNL Chancellor's Scholarship, Susan T. Buffett Foundation Scholarship, Dean H. and Floreen G. Eastman Top Scholars Scholarship, Olin E. Schultz Scholarship, Wesley and Elizabeth Stansbury Memorial Scholarship, Hugh and Marie Gibbs Memorial Scholarship, and the Honors Textbook Scholarship, resulting in an already paid-for college education.

He has advice to share to students who want to receive scholarships through good grades:

"Never stop asking questions, be it questions about classwork or in regard to life decisions. I believe that it is important to never be complete, to keep pushing and reevaluating what you and others say is possible. Most importantly, seize every chance and opportunity that comes to you, especially when it comes to tests like the ACT, SAT, and PSAT. Take these them as soon as you can, as often as you can. Even as a freshman, you can use them to help identify your strengths and weaknesses and expand upon those before taking them when it really counts. I think it's also important to recognize that receiving an education isn't truly about the tests or stressing over that little number known as GPA, but it's about challenging yourself and growing as a person. ...and always do your homework on time, seriously," he said.



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Brady is the son of Kelli Bilbrey and Brian Wilkerson. He will be attending the University of Nebraska – Lincoln (UNL) and major in mathematics with a research focus. He plans to stay at UNL and work toward receiving his Master’s degree and Ph.D. in mathematics. He aspires to work at the United States Dept. of Defense as a Mathematician.

The remaining National Hispanic Scholars in Nebraska are:

- Carley Marie Ayers, formerly of Mother of Divine Grace School of Ojai, Calif. who moved to Nebraska her senior year;
- Paul Stephen Cervantes of Creighton Preparatory Academy in Omaha;
- Matthew Jonathan Kernen of Concordia Junior/Senior High School in Omaha; and
- Eric Bay Perez of Papillion-La Vista South High School in Papillion.

Although being named a National Hispanic Scholar does not provide a financial reward, the title is prestigious and the list of Hispanic Scholars is sent to colleges and universities nationwide.

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Note: Photos Available