



## Patricia “Shay” Mitchell

**College:** Hamline University, St. Paul

**Year:** Sophomore

**Major:** Elementary Education

**Goal:** Work with elementary or middle school children

Patricia “Shay” Mitchell was tired of being in high school her senior year and would rather have spent time with her new baby sister. “I just wanted to be done with high school,” said Shay. “And my grades suffered.”

But her mother, who got pregnant at 15 and dropped out of high school, knew the importance of finishing school and wanted her daughter to succeed. “She always made sure I did my homework and would look it over,” said Shay. “My mother would say ‘You have to go to college. You will go.’ Because of her aspirations for me, it helped me grow.”

Shay also participated in a pre-college program where she learned about preparing, paying and applying for college. “I might have fallen through the cracks and ended up somewhere else,” she said, “but my

college access coach knew all the ins and outs and showed a lot of dedication in keeping me on track.”

During high school, Shay learned how to set priorities and manage her time since she needed to balance school and work. But she regrets not being more involved in extracurricular activities. “I tried cheerleading and track, but it was too hard to juggle those with work,” she said. “Plus, there was also a lot of pressure to socialize within those groups and I just wasn’t into that.”

Shay enjoys studying a wide range of topics in college, and the time management skills she learned in high school have come in handy. “Even though it looks like you have a lot of free time, you need to set aside specific times to study,” said Shay. “There is no one leaning over your

shoulder making you do anything. The responsibility is all yours. You need to stay focused.”

Shay is the oldest of four children in her family. While her mother encouraged her kids to achieve, she was not able to save money for college. Instead, Shay pays for college with a Hamline scholarship, private scholarships to which she applied, grants, work study and federal loans.

With two years of college completed, Shay is looking forward to the future. She is also proud that her mother pushed her and is now going to college herself after earning her GED. “Learning only propels you,” emphasized Shay. “It doesn’t hurt to learn. It definitely hurts not to learn.”



## Eric Bell

**College:** Rochester Community & Technical College, Rochester

**Year:** First-year student

**Major:** Liberal Arts

**Goal:** Transfer to Winona State University to become a special education teacher



From a young age, Eric Bell had to learn how to work around his hearing disability. Even with hearing aids, he hears less than what other people hear so he taught himself to lip read. School still posed something of a challenge. "I can't lip read and take notes at the same time so I have to borrow notes or need someone to take notes for me," said Eric. "I often would just memorize what the teacher said and read the textbooks."

Eric didn't let his disability prevent him from participating in sports in middle or high school. "I did track, basketball, baseball and football," said Eric. "Basketball was my favorite, but I chronically dislocated my knees and ruined the cartilage. I knew sports wouldn't take me anywhere later in life."

Although his parents didn't talk to him much about college, Eric knew they wanted him to go. And he had heard many times in high school that you need a college education

to get a good job. Still, he worried about social situations since it's hard for him to hear when people talk at the same time. "I knew I was going to go," he said, "and that my hearing was a barrier, but I also knew I would overcome it."

Because of his parent's income, Eric did not qualify for federal or state grants to help pay for college. But he was eligible for the state vocational rehabilitation program that helps people with disabilities afford education. The program covers almost half of his college tuition and book expenses. "I also received a scholarship from the college's foundation for a year," said Eric, "and a distant relative volunteered to pay what's left."

A two-year college didn't seem much harder than high school for Eric. Still, it required a good work ethic. "If you do the work, it's not that much harder," he said. "You just need to study every single day."

Eric continues to set high expectations for himself and hopes to graduate from college early because he earned college credit by taking Advanced Placement courses in high school. He is determined not to let his hearing problem prevent him from achieving his goals.

"High school was hard because of my disability; I had to worry more about that than enjoy it," said Eric. "My advice is to enjoy high school, but also work toward college. Have fun and work at the same time."



## Sue Xiong

**College:** Macalester College, St. Paul

**Year:** Senior

**Major:** Psychology

**Goal:** To become a social worker to help those in her community

Sue Xiong's parents didn't have any education when they came to the United States from Laos, but she knew they wanted her and her six siblings to go to college.

"There was always that expectation to do well so we could get into college and get a good job, to have a life better than them," said Sue. "You need to get a good education to get anywhere."

In high school, Sue took Advanced Placement classes since she didn't find the regular classes challenging enough, and she was glad she took them. "They were hard and required a lot of reading and writing," she said, "but they really prepared me for college."

Paying for college was her biggest fear, but her Admissions Possible coach walked her through the financial aid process. Today, her college costs are covered by a combination of grants, scholarships,

work study and federal loans. "I applied to seven colleges and Macalester was actually my last choice because it was so expensive," she said. "I was planning to go to St. Catherine University, but they didn't give me as much financial aid as Macalester. I learned that you really don't know what college will cost until after you apply."

Sue struggled socially and academically her first year of college. She felt isolated from her Hmong community and failed an entry-level class in computer science, which she had planned to choose as her major. "It was very demoralizing having been an A student in high school and having taken AP classes," she said. "I worried I might lose one of my scholarships, but my friends and the scholarship people encouraged me to stay and do my best and I did."

Now a senior, Sue is glad she didn't give up. She began a Hmong

student club at Macalester to help other students learn about Hmong culture. Through her work-study job, she connects other Macalester students to volunteer opportunities and organizes campus visits for elementary, middle and high school students.

Living on campus while in college has helped her stay focused on her academics and grow as a person. "You realize how different everything is," she said, "and, at the same time, you learn to appreciate your family more."

Sue is passionate about college access and strongly encourages everyone to go to college even if they don't have the financial resources. "There's a lot of financial support out there to help students. If you tell yourself that you can go to college, you can. You just need to work toward that goal."