



# The Queer Foundation Scholar

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## Meet the 2016-2017 QF Scholars



**Helen Guo**  
San Ramon, California



**Ella Murray**  
New York City, New York



**Jason Quackenbush**  
Catonsville, Maryland

Their award-winning essays can be found at [www.queerfoundation.org](http://www.queerfoundation.org) See the next page for more information about the three scholarship recipients.

The 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Queer Foundation English Essay Contest for High School Seniors attracted entries from 222 students from all over the U.S. The QF wishes to express its sincere appreciation to the six members of the National Council of Teachers of English who read all 222 essays and to the six nationally known scholars and activists who read the essays of 15 semi-finalists and selected the three scholarship recipients.

We're still looking for mentors for three scholarship recipients and several Special Mention students. Contact me at [rverzasconi@msn.com](mailto:rverzasconi@msn.com) if you're interested in volunteering. We need individuals with a background in either creative writing, human rights law, environmental studies, psychology/psychiatry, political science, East Asian languages & cultures, or stage management. On the following pages, student names followed by a star ★ would appreciate but do not yet have a mentor. How else can you help foster the aims of the Queer Foundation? Consider an annual or even a monthly donation. You can set up a \$5 or \$10 a month donation from your credit card by using Network for Good at our website: [www.queerfoundation.org](http://www.queerfoundation.org)

Equally important, forward this newsletter to family members and friends.

Ray Verzasconi, editor

**Helen Guo★** graduated from Dougherty Valley High School in San Ramon, CA. She is a staunch LGBTQ ally, considering her lesbian older sister to be her mentor and idol.

She has worked tirelessly to change the attitudes and beliefs of the local Chinese-American community, both socially and religiously conservative, toward all marginalized peoples, but especially those in the LGBTQ community. Her teachers describe her as an articulate, thoughtful, kind, and enlightened human being with strong leadership skills.

A cross-country star, Ms. Guo will be attending Pomona College, possibly majoring in sociology. Career-wise, however, she hopes to make her mark as a human rights lawyer and advocate.

**Ella Murray★** graduated from the Ethical Culture Fieldston School in the Bronx, NY, where she was active in the school's GSA and an LGBT Network.

Through the Ittleson Foundation, which supports innovative programs that benefit the underprivileged, she participated with 44 other students in an outdoor leadership program, working on a Vermont farm for a summer. At school she was the stage manager for three shows. She also participated in Consent Awareness Day activities in the East Village.

Her teachers praise her selflessness and her role as an emotional and intellectual stabilizing force

who helps all students in her classes become engaged in classroom activities.

Ms. Murray will attend Oberlin College where she will major in environmental studies.

**Jason Quackenbush** graduated from Catonsville High School in Catonsville, MD. He also attended the Drama Learning Center of the Red Branch Theatre Co. in Columbia, MD. It was at the Drama Learning Center that he received rave reviews for his portrayal of La Ciénega in *Bring It On the Musical*. He also served as a swing at the Red Branch Theatre Co. production of *Dogfight*, receiving praise from the director for his ability to step in at the last minute in several different roles.

Mr. Quackenbush's teachers note his intelligence, his cheerful demeanor, and his willingness to reach out to students contending with identity issues. It was this interest in others that helped him convince the members of the local Christian Youth Fellowship to make equality and justice for the LGBTQ community one of its priorities. His powers of persuasion were such that the Fellowship's Director and Youth Pastor writes that he himself finally came out as bisexual.

Mr. Quackenbush will be attending Rider University's Westminster College of the Arts, and plans to earn a BFA in Musical Theatre. Jason has been paired with Brendan Lambert, former QF Scholar who has performed in musical theatre in Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and New York.

# Special Mention

Special Mention is conferred upon those students whose essay receives one or more votes in the initial round of judging. Below we feature those whose essay made it into the final round of judging and who have provided us with permission to publish biographical information. .

**Zoe Bauer.** Nashville, TN



Ms. Bauer attended the University School of Nashville where she was head editor of the literary magazine and president of the GSA and of the Writing Club.

She will attend Pomona College, majoring in linguistics. She is “particularly interested in the ways that languages with typically masculine and feminine structures can change and adapt to be gender-neutral.”

Ms. Bauer hopes to pursue a career in academia and “do research about the intersection of language and gender.”

**Sarah Cavin \***. Placentia, CA



Ms. Cavin attended El Dorado High School in Placentia, CA, where she was active in many activities, including being president of the Neurology Club, a Board member of the Digital Media Arts Academy, and a member of the water polo and swim teams. She was also a volunteer for several local shelters and non-profit organizations.

She will attend the University of California, Berkeley, majoring in chemistry. However, she also has a very strong interest in sociology, political science, and queer studies.

For the moment, Ms. Cavin is keeping her options open, considering a career in research, medicine, or law.



Elijah Punzal. ★ Redwood City, CA.



Mr. Punzal is a graduate of Sequoia High School in Redwood City, CA, where he was active in the school orchestra, GSA, theatre program, Global Health Club, and Science Superheroes. He was also a volunteer at a local teen health clinic.

He will attend the University of California, Irvine. He is currently leaving his options open both in terms of his academic major and his career. He has a great interest in English literature and creative writing, but he also finds math both fun and challenging. In terms of a career, he is open to entering the theatre arts, becoming an “established activist for human rights and justice,” or a teacher, or all of them.

Mr. Punzal is also fascinated by video games “in their methodology of storytelling” because “they really engage the player with the world and everything in it.”

Information on other Special Mention students will appear in future issues of the 2016-17 volume.

## From the Editor's Desk...

Take a half-hour without having to contemplate the nightmare of a President Donald Trump and read the essays of this year's three scholarship recipients and the Special Mention students who've given the QF permission to post their essays on our website:

[www.queerfoundation.org](http://www.queerfoundation.org)

- Here's the Hilton Hotel Worldwide ad that appeared in the June 2016 issue of *Travel & Leisure* that has the American Family Association and other homophobic groups in a lather:

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/family-association-hilton-gay-ad\\_us\\_579a0a34e4b01180b531e294?section](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/family-association-hilton-gay-ad_us_579a0a34e4b01180b531e294?section)

- Back in my college days (more than a half-century ago), my professors in the humanities lamented the death of poetry or, at least, that youth no longer appreciated poetry. But then Jacques Barzun, the 20<sup>th</sup> century's most influential humanist, didn't hesitate to point out that the professorial lamenters were themselves responsible given their decades-long effort to turn the humanities into a science and dissecting their individual parts until there was nothing of human substance left.

Slam poetry, a more recent invention, seems to have captured the imagination of many of today's youth, including a number of Queer Scholars such as **Javon Smith** of Chicago and **Andrew Gregory** of Seattle. With its debt ranging from the fiery sermons of evangelical preachers to rap, slam poetry takes us back millennia to a time before the printed word. Here's a few I've found that may be of interest.

Elliot Darrow's "God is Gay" is from a 2013 Button Poetry Slam Final at the University of North Carolina:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V6AQyBEN5fM>

Denice Frohman's "Dear Straight People" is also from a 2013 Women of the World Poetry Slam.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5frn8TAlew0>

More recently, 14-year-old Royce Mann's "White Boy Privilege" went viral with over 9 million hits in a month.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g4Q1jZ-LOT0/>

Although he would receive much acclaim while making the rounds of TV talk shows, young Royce also unleashed a vicious outpouring of anti-Semitic vitriol directed against him, his parents, and against all Jews.



Reprinted with permission of Respect Your Elders Campaign, The 519, Toronto (2015)

- When Trey Pearson of the Christian Rock Band Everyday Sunday came out in May, he unleashed a firestorm aimed at both him and his wife of some eight years. Pearson, 35, apparently knew from an early age that he was attracted to men, but like so many others raised in a conservative Christian family he tried to pray the gay away. He eventually married and fathered two children but even with counseling and prayer finally faced up to what he is and always has been. Like other Christian rock stars who've come out, such as Jennifer Knapp, Vicky Beeching, and Ray Boltz, Pearson will likely see his music career come to an abrupt end with his popular songs no longer being played in churches or on Christian radio stations, unless a number of evangelical church leaders have a say in the matter.

Pearson is so popular among evangelicals that some church leaders may be afraid that many of his followers will come to believe his argument that Biblical prohibitions against homosexuality are references to prostitution and promiscuity, and not the modern "loving" relationships. The result is that

they are trying to shame Pearson back into his marriage and shaming his wife into taking him back even if both must remain chaste for the rest of their lives.

- What do Peter Thiel, Chris Barron, Gregory T. Angelo, and Caitlyn Jenner have in common? Okay, I've brought you back to the political scene. I think Michelangelo Signorile called them "delusional," thinking that the Republican Party which is now Trump's Party has anything to offer the LGBTQ community. Barron, co-founder of the now defunct GOPride, has now founded an organization called LGBT for Trump—which may consist of as many members as did GOPride. Angelo, Executive Director of the Log Cabin Republicans, probably can count on a few more supporters, but both men and their organizations were snubbed at the RNC this year, as they have been in previous years.

In a *Huffington Post* interview with an openly gay Trump delegate, the delegate claimed he was "in it" for the long run. He, like billionaire Peter Thiel, is ignorant of history. Since the dawn of civilization, a few outsiders have tried to gain acceptance by trying to be like or behave like their oppressors. It's not just the Uncle Tom's and the Tío Tacos. Sometimes it means embracing the most superficial trappings of the oppressor while still clinging to one's principles.

But we don't have to look too far back to discover the dire consequences of such historical myopia. Hitler's rise to power would not have been possible without the support of General Röhm and some 150 other high-ranking army officers—all of them gay. All of them murdered during what Germans usually refer to as the Röhm Putsch and which in English is called The Night of the Long Knives—which was really a three-day weekend. Hitler's rise to power was also facilitated by several wealthy Jews and over a hundred middleclass Jewish "collaborators".

Peter Thiel's speech at the RNC may have been met with cheers and not jeers, but he's already been uninvited from another conservative conclave. He may think his \$billions will protect him when

Trump starts deporting undesirables, but he should study history. Or listen to what Trump says. Trump has never hidden the fact that he has absolutely no qualms about dispensing with anyone, including friends, when they no longer serve him. Such is the art of politics. Chelsea Clinton and Ivanka Trump are friends because when it still served their needs, their parents used to be close friends. It was less than three years ago that Trump is on record as saying that Hillary would make a great president—that before he decided to run.

- Advice needed. I'm hoping to host a three-day QF Scholar informal "post-election" seminar in Chicago in late March or early April 2017. I opt for Chicago both because we have more current and past QF Scholars living in the area than we do in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Boston, and NYC (in that order), and because it is more centrally located so it will cost me less to fly in a few QF Scholars from other regions.

Of course, my pockets aren't that deep, being a retired university professor on a fixed income. Question:s: do you know of a foundation that might support a queer seminar aimed at helping our young scholars answer the question, "What next?," as a follow-up to the November election? Would you consider helping me write a grant proposal?

Okay, if come next January Donald Trump is President and we still have a Republican Senate, I may pack my bags and spend the few remaining years of my life in Switzerland (I do have dual citizenship) or not! But if a more friendly Clinton is President and we get a more friendly Senate, then "What next?" might well entail answering a question posed by many of our high school senior essay writers over the past 5-6 years: how can LGBTQ organizations do differently to better serve the needs of queer racial and ethnic minorities?

# NO MORE

"WHAT KIND OF GUY WOULD LET THAT HAPPEN TO HIM?"



With permission of Joyful Heart Foundation. Male Survivors Campaign.

- **Viewer Discretion Advised.**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pkGbLcXPoWY&feature=youtu.be>

As painful as is viewing this documentary and others like it, sometimes we have to remind ourselves of the past not only to remember how far we've come, but how much we can still easily lose

Ray Verzasconi, Ph.D.

Ideas and opinions expressed in *The Queer Foundation Scholar* are those of the respective authors and not necessarily those of the Queer Foundation.

# From the Desk of the Executive Director

Any organization such as ours that provides a valuable service to youth and hopes to continue doing so needs a growing endowment. The leaders that founded The QF recognized this from that first year they provided scholarships and mentoring to the three outstanding 2006-07 Queer Scholars at San Francisco State, Rhode Island College, and Fordham University

Thanks to the founders' dedication and foresight, Queer Foundation now has an endowment of more than \$34,000. From its meager beginnings in 2006, ten years of steady growth gives testimony to the organization's careful management of it.

It is, however, still in its early development. To fulfill its purpose in the coming years, the endowment must expand tenfold or more. To this end, The QF solicits major contributions from individuals who support The QF's dream of equal opportunity for all students, regardless of their sexuality or gender identity.

Please join me in celebrating ten years of positive growth.

## Queer Foundation Endowment

at end of year

2006	\$ 255.00
2007	\$ 2,005.00
2008	\$ 3,505.00
2009	\$ 7,074.00
2010	\$10,588.00
2011	\$14,357.00
2012	\$16,733.00
2013	\$21,082.00
2014	\$30,300.00
2015	\$33,784.00

