

PRESS RELEASE

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Daughter of Yap, UOG valedictorian begins Harvard Medical School

Megan Gimmen, a former government of Guam Merit Scholar and valedictorian of her Okkodo High School and University of Guam graduating classes in 2016 and 2020, is beginning medical school this month at Harvard University on a full scholarship.

Gimmen, a first-generation college graduate, received acceptance letters from a total of 12 medical schools — four of which were Ivy League schools: Harvard University, Yale University, the University of Pennsylvania, and Cornell University. She was also offered full scholarships from several on the list but ultimately chose Harvard, where she will spend four years in the Doctor of Medicine program with her tuition and partial living expenses covered.

Harvard Medical School is ranked the No. 1 Best Medical School for Research and the No. 9 Best Medical School for Primary Care by U.S. News & World Report.

Coming from the close-knit island communities of both Guam and Yap, where her parents are from, Gimmen said she chose Harvard largely due to its supportive and friendly campus community. Moreover, she was inspired by the research, work, and attitudes of the faculty and students.

“I really like the people I met there. [...] I thought it was very powerful to feel encouraged and motivated just speaking with the students,” she said. “Their mindset there is you don’t have to wait until later, you can try to make change now.”

Gimmen’s interest in going to medical school began in high school, when members of her family had to move off-island for medical treatment and she witnessed the stress of navigating the health care system and the financial strain it put on her family.

“There are a lot of disparities in our health care system in Guam, and we just don’t have a lot of the resources,” she said. “In other islands surrounding us, they have even less resources. That’s what kind of made me think, ‘Hey, somebody should do something about this.’”

Gimmen enrolled at the University of Guam in 2016 and double majored in chemistry and biology. During her time at UOG, she availed of different opportunities to gain experience, including the BUILD EXITO research program through Portland State University and two internships with the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Md.

An internship with Guam Memorial Hospital allowed her to apply what she learned in the classroom and gain hands-on experience working with patients.

“I would help feed patients their meals or help with their physical therapy,” she said. “At the long-term care facility, they’re there for a longer time, so you get to build more of a relationship with patients. It was a great experience, and I really enjoyed it.”

After graduating from UOG in 2020, Gimmen began a two-year Doctoral Diversity Program at Johns Hopkins University (Md.), which provided mentorship and research experience to prepare her for medical school.

Now attending Harvard Medical School as of Aug. 1, she gives credit to her mentors and strong support systems in the Guam and Yap communities for providing guidance, support, and encouragement throughout her undergraduate journey.

“I really liked my time at UOG — I think the biggest thing was community. I was close to a lot of the people I was going to school with, and I was able to have a relationship with a lot of my professors,” she said.

Tedros Bezabeh, her former chemistry professor at UOG, said her achievement is an inspiration for all students in Guam.

“Because of her, many now believe getting into Ivy League medical schools is not out of reach,” Bezabeh said.

Gimmen advises aspiring medical students in Guam to seek out and take advantage of the many pre-medical fellowships, research positions, pipeline programs, and gap-year programs that are available. She also advises students to find a mentor: “Mentorship is integral for navigating higher education and medicine,” she said. “Look for mentors who want the best for you and value you both as a student and a person.”

Regarding choosing a medical specialty, Gimmen said she is keeping her options open for now. But one thing is for sure: She is on a mission to create positive change in health care for future generations.

“I hope that whatever it is, I’m able to make it about ways to improve the health care system to make it more equitable for Pacific Islanders and other populations that experience serious health disparities,” she said. “Our community deserves so much.”

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Photo captions:



2022-aug-megan-gimmen-hms-1

Megan Gimmen commemorates her first day of medical school with a photo on the Harvard Medical School campus. The Merit Scholar and two-time valedictorian from Guam began a four-year Doctor of Medicine program on Aug. 1.

Photo courtesy of Megan Gimmen



2022-aug-megan-gimmen-hms-2

Megan Gimmen wears her lab coat on the Harvard Medical School campus, where she began a four-year Doctor of Medicine on Aug. 1.

Photo courtesy of Megan Gimmen



2022-uog-megan-gimmen-3

Megan Gimmen stands outside the Science Building on the University of Guam campus holding the Harvard Medical School pennant, where she began a Doctor of Medicine program on a full scholarship on Aug. 1. She graduated as valedictorian from both Okkodo High School in 2016 and the University of Guam in 2020, where she double majored in biology and chemistry.

Photo courtesy of the University of Guam



2022-megan-gimmen4

Megan Gimmen, left, first row, with her fellow researchers from the Blackshaw Lab at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, where she participated in a two-year medical school prep program after graduating from the University of Guam in 2020. She has since been accepted to 12 medical schools and is beginning her Doctor of Medicine this month at Harvard University.

Photo courtesy of Megan Gimmen