

AN ENDURING LEGACY

Scholars Visit the Dallas Museum of Art to Explore the McDermott Collection



Bonnie Pitman (far left), the 2018 Scholars, and Chirag Gokani ('17, far right) at the "An Enduring Legacy: The Eugene and Margaret McDermott Collection of Impressionist and Modern Art" exhibit at the DMA

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

SOLUNA at the Nasher

April 23, 2019

2019 Nasher Prize Laureate Isa Genzken's work will be showcased at the Nasher while Dallas Symphony Musicians perform an intimate chamber concert. Full details and event registration [here](#).

Save The Date!

May 4, 2019

Several event options are being explored, but all will fall on this date.

Signature Summer Event

June 2019

Annual UT Dallas Alumni Relations Signature Summer Event - last year's evening of music with Memphis Soul was hosted at the Arboretum!

I joined the Class of 2018 on February 1st for a tour of the McDermott Collection and other works Mrs. McDermott gifted the Dallas Museum of Art (DMA). Bonnie Pitman, Distinguished Scholar in Residence for the Edith O'Donnell Institute of Art History and former Director of the DMA, led the tour, providing analyses of selected works and sharing stories of Mrs McDermott's close relationship with the DMA.

Ms. Pitman began the tour by asking us to describe Mrs. McDermott and her legacy in three ways. I was fortunate to interact with Mrs. McDermott a handful of times and expected my description of her to differ significantly from those of the '18s, who became Scholars after Mrs. McDermott's passing.

But the fact that my reflections of Mrs. McDermott and theirs both focused on

her love of the fine arts, the city of Dallas, and UTD showed me the magnitude of Mrs. McDermott's momentum: the ideals, communities, and institutions she cared for live on and will probably continue to grow after we're gone, too.

Ms. Pitman let us explore the gallery and encouraged us to each find a painting that caught our attention. After a few minutes, we reunited and began analyzing some of these paintings with Ms. Pitman. We began with one of Monet's Water Lilies, which inspired the gallery's title, "Reflections." Ms. Pitman instructed that we look for spatial patterns between the lilies, ripples of water, and reflections of clouds, a macroscopic, "low resolution" form of artistic expression Ms. Pitman attributed to the cataracts that afflicted Monet's vision toward the end of his life.

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PRESIDENT'S DESK

President Megan Coker shares some of the Alumni Association's recent news

Dear McDermott Alumni,

Since I saw many of you during Finalists' Weekend, I'll keep this President's Desk on the shorter side. A lot has happened since our last newsletter in the fall. The Board of the McDermott Alumni Association has identified a new project for the next contribution to the University, made progress on our financial goals by creating an operational reserve from investment income, wrapped up the most successful winter fundraising drive to date, and hosted events for alumni, scholars, and friends. More details on those developments can be found below and throughout this newsletter.

Last year, in lieu of flowers or other gestures, many of you contributed to the Alumni Association in memory of Margaret McDermott. The Board wanted to honor those contributions in an especially meaningful way, and it recently voted to use those contributions to establish the Excellence in the Arts Award at UT Dallas.

As further explained on page 4, the Excellence in the Arts Award aims to honor the legacy of Margaret McDermott by marrying her lifelong support for both UT Dallas and the arts. In the Spring 2019 semester, a \$1,000 grant will be awarded to one UT Dallas student for an outstanding research paper written in an art history course at UT Dallas, as chosen by a committee of faculty and alumni.

The Alumni Association hopes that this will only be the inaugural award and that we can help to raise the profile of the arts at UT Dallas and assist students engaging in the study of the arts by establishing this award as an institutional reality at UT Dallas in the years to come. Of course, none of this would have been possible without your generous donations last May. Thank you for inspiring and enabling us to honor Margaret McDermott. We think



Alumni and Scholars gathered for a potluck in February

she would much prefer this additional tribute to her legacy over verdant, but fading, flowers.

As you'll see in more detail on page 9, your generosity extended from May all the way into our winter fundraising drive. We are proud to announce our most successful winter fundraising drive so far, with total donations of \$24,911 and impressive participation across classes and even among third parties.

We appreciate your faith in our mission and activities, and we do not take these figures lightly. Your outstanding participation means that we can give back to the University, both through the Worsfold Grants Program and through new initiatives like the Excellence in the Arts Award. And it means that we can meet our goals of having an operational reserve to keep our activities stable in leaner years while also investing in future financial stability.

Ensuring future financial stability and securing our ability to help shape the McDermott Scholars Program and the University in the years to come remain top of mind for us, as we know they do

for you. We cannot thank you enough for moving us one step closer to those important goals.

Finally, we've taken time to share in each other's company and have some fun alongside our more serious endeavors. As you've likely seen in emails from Sherry, we are working with the Scholars to establish a mentorship program, and we are volunteering to review roadmaps and help the Scholars to map out their class schedules, study abroad plans, and extracurricular activities to reach their long-term goals.

We've also shared fellowship with Dallas-area alums and Scholars at an in-home potluck dinner after a flurry of activities during the holiday season. We also enjoyed reuniting with many of you at Mary's welcome reception Friday evening and on Saturday for our annual meeting, Finalists Weekend events, and alumni happy hour. If you did not receive details about any of these events, please let us know and we'll update your contact information.

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In the coming months, we'll engage in more Dallas-based and nationwide regional events, further contribute to Dallas and the University, help to select and welcome a new class of McDermott Scholars, perform a comprehensive review and revision of our bylaws to

make sure our organizational structure and governance match our increasingly sophisticated operations and goals, and continue to develop our financial resources for future contributions.

We hope many of you were able to join our annual meeting this past weekend. If you missed it, it will be linked

on our [website](#) along with links for this newsletter, other articles, updates, and news.

Whoosh & hope to see you again soon!

Megan Coker ('06), President
Eugene McDermott Scholars Program
Alumni Association

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

The McDermott Program has undergone some changes to accommodate the University's growth

Dear Alumni,

As you know, the university is constantly changing – the population has doubled since 2006 to over 28,000 students, and the faculty, staff, and campus have grown accordingly. The January 2015 to September 2018 period held five leadership changes (six if you include Margaret McDermott's passing) that affected the McDermott Program. The UT System has had not one but two new chancellors, UT Dallas got a new president and a new provost, and the McDermott Program got a new director. You all have lived through similar changes – of chancellor and president, of McDermott leadership and team members. These changes, not any one person's vision, drive change in the McDermott universe.

Recent changes to the McDermott Scholars program are to the how, not the what or why, of it. We offer outstanding individuals a four-year, full-time, campus-based undergraduate academic experience with impactful added elements. The Scholar and the Program remain partners; the Program provides tools and resources, and the Scholar provides their best effort, using the resources and tools they're provided.

The Program continues to share with all of its stakeholders – past, present, and future Scholars; the McDermott family; the university and its leadership; the UT System; and ultimately the state of Texas, its taxpayers, and all of its people – the goal of Scholars having the best possible experiences and outcomes. Our operations in support of this goal must also be the best possible. Some entities require that specific mechanisms be used and certain metrics applied; as these change, we change (for example, accommodating new UT System accounting practices, new UT Dallas study abroad protocols, new SACS academic audit standards, etc.). And obviously everything must withstand scrutiny.

Recent adjustments that impact Scholars' lived experience of the Program include:

- Formalized staff-Scholar contact, with staffers regularly providing standardized advising and support to Scholars in their assigned cohort
- A standardized approach to planning ahead for Scholar activity (six months for approval, three months for finalizing)
- Emphasis on Scholars using the first one to two years to prepare to best take advantage of more advanced and resource-rich opportunities later
- Standardized faculty and alumni involvement in Scholar undertakings – the statement of support required to accompany any proposal is the culmination of ongoing mentoring conversations with relevant experts
- Standardized defenses for activities – opportunities for Scholars to develop judgment about activities and develop presentation skills
- Standardized academic component to study abroad and other experiential learning.

Accordingly, the iterative guiding documents for Scholars have undergone another revision. The "handbook" has been broken into two parts, a one-page distillation of policies and a multi-page document detailing procedures. These remain tools (like a syllabus) intended to help Scholars. They focus on expectations, accountability, and processes to support these. The one-page document features the big picture (the Program pillars, the three domains of standing) so each Scholar can easily know where s/he stands. The procedures document and its related forms, online tools, etc. will continue to be revised as needed.

It goes without saying that the collective and individual support of the Alumni members of the Program community is critical and appreciated. Your feedback about the Program is always valued and appreciated.

With thanks,

Reena Schellenberg, Director
Hobson Wildenthal Chair
Eugene McDermott Scholars Program

EXCELLENCE IN THE ARTS AWARD

An Initiative of the Eugene McDermott Scholars Program Alumni Association



Mrs. Margaret McDermott sitting in front of Monet's "The Water Lily Pond" (1903)

To honor the legacy of Margaret McDermott and her life-long support for both UT Dallas and the arts, the Eugene McDermott Scholars Program Alumni Association has created the Excellence in the Arts Award. The Association will award, in the Spring 2019 semester, a \$1,000 grant to one student for an outstanding research paper written for an art history course at UT Dallas.

Art History at UT Dallas is a burgeoning field, one which combines

Mrs. McDermott's deep history of supporting the visual arts with her commitment to improving the university her husband co-founded in 1964. The Award will both support the growth of Art History at UT Dallas, as well as honor Mrs. McDermott's memory by benefiting the arts, academic excellence, and UT Dallas, three causes she championed throughout her philanthropic career.

During the Spring 2019 semester, the Alumni Association will request

submissions of research papers written for an art history course at UT Dallas. A committee composed of faculty and alumni will select the grantee from the submitted papers.

Inspired by Emory University's Dorothy Fletcher Paper Prize, the Award will, in addition to a cash prize of \$1,000, provide art history students and faculty further opportunity to work together on serious research projects, to publish their work, and to build prestige for successful students hoping to become contributors to the field of art history.

The Alumni Association intends to announce the inaugural winner of the Excellence in the Arts Award in May 2019 to commemorate the one-year anniversary of Mrs. McDermott's passing. The Alumni Association hopes to grow the award in the years to come, and to extend its scope to other media and arts projects.

This first iteration of the Excellence in the Arts Award will grant \$1,000 to a current UT Dallas student for an outstanding research paper written for an art history course at UT Dallas.

The idea for the award came from a deep appreciation for the art history faculty I had the pleasure to work with during my undergraduate career. It felt like the perfect proposal for the money the Association raised at Mrs. McDermott's memorial in lieu of flowers because art history at UT Dallas combines her passion for the arts, scholarship, and students.

It is my hope that the award will promote art history students and faculty, and the department as a whole for years to come.

-- Elyse Mack ('14)

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

Getting to know one of our amazing UT Dallas faculty members

Name: Jonathan Palant

Hometown: Lexington, Massachusetts

Family members: Spouse Mark, Son Noah (age 5), Daughter Caroline (age 2), Lola, our 70-pound pit bull and the friendliest dog anyone has ever met (age 7)

Rank order of siblings: I am the youngest of three children.

Undergraduate and Graduate programs:

- University of Michigan – Bachelors in Music Education, 1997
- Temple University – Masters in Choral Conducting, 2002
- Michigan State University – Doctor of Musical Arts, 2007

Dissertation: “Unifying A Nation: Male Singing Societies and Part Songs in Nineteenth Century Germany”

Current Research/Publications:

- Brothers, Sing On! Conducting the Tenor-Bass Choir (book), Hal Leonard Corporation
- Brothers, Sing On! Jonathan Palant Choral Series, Mark Foster/Hal Leonard Publishing

Coollest part of your job: Building enough trust with my students to allow them to take risks with our music making. There is nothing like creating live art when everyone is free and confident.

If you could teach any other elective, what would it be: An introductory course on conducting.

Dream end-of-career job: I love what I do now and can't imagine doing anything different! Sounds cliché, but it's true and I hope to create engaging and inspiring music for a very, very long time.

Future non-career ambitions: I love to travel, so I'd like to walk the spice markets in India, see the seals bask in Antarctica, go camping in Yellowstone Park, ride an elephant in Thailand, and dive the Great Barrier Reef – again!

Favorite part(s) about Dallas: Dallas, in my opinion, is not a great place to visit, but it's an awesome place to live. There are great restaurants, terrific shopping, parks in every corner of the city, and it's full of welcoming, diverse, intelligent, cultured people. Being a liberal Yankee myself, I never saw myself enjoying Texas as I do.

One surprising thing UTD doesn't know about you: I love watching, tracking, and learning about airplanes. I have several mobile applications that allow me to see every commercial plane in the sky at any given moment. I'll also listen to air traffic control from time to time. To be honest, I do the same for police and fire and have “responded” on my own from time to time.

The most exciting thing you've done: When I was 16, I played under the great conductor and composer Leonard Bernstein. I suppose conducting at Carnegie Hall comes in a close second.

What you would do with \$1 million: I would expand programming for the Dallas Street Choir, a musical outlet for those experiencing



Dr. Jonathan Palant

homelessness and disadvantage. At present, we have one choir that meets weekly. \$1 million would allow the organization to hire more staff, develop more in-depth curriculum, expand our musical offerings, and perhaps hire a liaison to facilitate housing and employment for our members. Not a fancy goal, but a necessary one.

What you would do with stopped time: I would never want time to stand still, as progress only happens when we take risks and learn from our experiences. Stopping time means nothing changes, grows, or, ultimately, gets better.

If you could have any superpower: For a long time, I wanted the ability to become invisible, as it would allow me to see and hear things in their purest form, i.e. nothing filtered and everything honest and raw. Now, I think I'd like the power to travel back in time. Is that even a superpower? That said, I would love to meet J.S. Bach, have a dinner with Dr. King, and explain to those who crafted the second amendment how it would be misinterpreted for generations to come.

What you want to tell the Alumni Association/students: UT Dallas continues to be a wonderful place where students become well-rounded members of society. I am proud the choral program contributes to this and it's a joy to see the curricular choirs flourish. Current students have a standing invitation to join University Choir or Chamber Singers, while alumni should consider attending a performance in the near future!



AN ENDURING LEGACY



Julia LaFond ('18) admiring Monet's "The Water Lily Pond" (1903)

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We moved on to George Braque's *Still Life with Guitar*, a Cubist piece I remember studying in a high school art history course. Though I spent hours analyzing and writing about the piece in high school, Ms. Pitman pointed out several subtle images that had previously eluded me. The piece's green hues seemed to remind everyone of either an avocado or a peacock.

A highlight of the tour included analyzing Edgar Degas's 1880 portrait *Dancer with a Fan*. Ms. Pitman asked Solvay Linde '18 to emulate the dancer's nuanced posture, which helped us more clearly see the sense of graceful indifference Degas likely intended to convey in his painting.

I was struck by Gustave Caillebotte's *The Path in the Garden*, which reminded me of a trail at the Dallas Arboretum. The painting revealed Mrs. McDermott's taste in natural beauty, and the fact that it so closely resembled a place to which Mrs. McDermott was an instrumental benefactor cannot be coincidental.

My favorite work in the gallery was Paul Signac's *Mont Saint-Michel*, a pointillist painting of a French island-castle at sunset. In the gallery's accompanying book *Reflections*, Mrs. McDermott writes, "I like to move my pictures from room to room;

Mont Saint-Michel looks splendid everywhere, and it changes each room wherever it is placed."

The joy Mrs. McDermott derived from moving paintings from room to room will live on in her permission for the DMA to scatter her collection throughout the museum, permission to which most donors of art collections would never concede.

Mrs. McDermott's wish that her paintings be seen throughout the museum and by all members of the Dallas community parallels the behavior of massive stars at the end of their lives: they explode in supernovae, enriching their surroundings with metallic elements that facilitate the formation of planets, air, and life.

We owe our very existence to such massive stars, just as we owe our academic and artistic lives to Mrs. McDermott.

-- Chirag Gokani ('17)



Ben Wise ('18) imitating art at the direction of Ms. Bonnie Pitman

ALUMNI RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Established by the McDermott Council, this Scholar-led group brings alumni and Scholars together



Alumni and scholars get together at Braum's

The Alumni Relations Committee, a sub-committee of the scholar-led McDermott Council, was established in the spring of 2018 as a McDermott Council initiative to advance goals and programs put forth by the current scholars. Primary among said goals was the creation of a body that would serve to further connect scholars with alumni of the Program.

One of the first committees created was the Alumni Relations Committee. In its first year of existence, this committee has assumed responsibility for the McDermott family "big-little" program, hosted scholar-alumni dinner and ice cream socials, and established a mentorship program connecting current scholars with alumni for professional and personal development.

The McDermott family system was formally organized in 2014. Every family consists of a scholar from each class (or two scholars depending on class size). Each entering freshman

scholar is assigned to an existing family. Families have different traditions and engage in activities from dinner nights and game nights to Dallas area outings. The Alumni Relations Committee is now responsible for welcoming the incoming freshmen into families and pairing them with established families based on matching personality and interests.

To facilitate the formation of more personal connections between current scholars and Dallas area alums, dinner and ice-cream socials have become recurring events. Fadi's Mediterranean Grill and Braum's Ice Cream have become the Committee's favorite local spots to host events. Each social so far has drawn approximately 20 scholars and alums.

The Alumni Mentor Program is the newest initiative of the committee. The goal of this program is to pair current scholars with alums pursuing a similar career path. Almost 30 alumni have signed up to receive a scholar mentee.

Mentor/mentee pairs will be matched by the Alumni Relations Committee members and introduced through email. To participate in the program, pairs only need to communicate via email on a semi-regular basis, though the long-term hope is that pairs will become close, meet in person/video chat, and form a mutually beneficial and productive relationship.

There is huge potential for scholars and alums to form meaningful personal mentorship relationships beyond the formal networking that occurs at larger program events like Finalists' Weekend. The Alumni Relations Committee is working to provide opportunities for these close connections to become the rule rather than the exception.

If you have an idea for an event or initiative for the Committee to host, please let us know!

-- Sydney Sherman ('15)

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Highlighting the success and uniqueness of our alumni



Name: Austin Swafford

Nicknames: None that ever stuck

Spouse/kids/pets:

Spouse: Dr. Jessica Galant-Swafford
Dogs: Mozart Heschel Swafford (15 lb Shi-Poo) and Groot Falkor Swafford (62 lb Labradoodle)

Class: '05 (the best)

Major: B.S. Molecular Biology with a focus on Nanotechnology

Graduate school and degree (if applicable): Ph.D. in Medical Genetics and Immunology; University of Cambridge-National Institutes of Health/National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease

Hometown: New Orleans, LA, USA

Home teams: Geaux Saints!

Current location: San Diego, CA, USA

Occupation: I'm the Director of Research-Innovations at the UC San Diego Center for Microbiome Innovation. My primary role is to work with partners in industry and professors at UC San Diego to develop new technologies and techniques to advance research into the microbiome, the countless microbes that cover nearly every surface of the planet, including your own body. I also serve as the representative for microbiome research at UC San Diego in a variety of public-facing activities aimed at improving research in our field.

Coolest part about your job: Day-to-day I love mentoring students and postdocs, helping them achieve the 'Aha!' moments of insight and inspiration that makes science rewarding, but the 'coolest' part is when I get to have an impact on major policy decisions such as how to secure the food supply, which standards we should use to assess the quality of microbiome experiments, or how to design an appropriate genetic inventory to answer the question of whether there is life on Mars.

Dream end-of-career job: Although hopefully the end of my career is far in the future, I'd like to end my career in public service, and then segue into a passive 'career' as a public intellectual.

Future non-career ambitions: Starting a family!

Outside talents (e.g. sports, music, theater, trivia...): I'm an amateur polyglot (French, Spanish, Hebrew, Japanese, British English, German, TBD...) and linguist, I enjoy cooking (always spicy) and baking (except cookies which I can't make to save my life), trivia (non-sports), and most recently designing board games.

The most dangerous / exciting thing you've done:

Dangerous: Skydiving with the Extreme Sports Club at UTD.

Exciting: Before we became 'old' (30) I gathered a group of friends from UTD, grad school, and my professional life and we spent 5 days hiking in the Andes and ending at Machu Picchu.

One surprising thing Alumni wouldn't know about you: I'm an avid brewer, with plans to begin selling my ales this fall.

Favorite part about UTD: Late nights with my friends, be it epic board game sessions, spelunking, or making up for procrastination on Destination Imagination.

Favorite McDermott memory: Winning the Comet Cup as A Modest Proposal!

What you want to tell the McDermott Scholars: Breathe. You are here because of your spirit, your character, and your passion for doing great things and giving back to the community that gives to you. But you're not alone, and you don't have to do it all. Look at the amazing people around you and reach out to them for help, in your classes, on your projects, and for physical and mental support. Your classmates are some of the most impressive people you'll ever meet, so cherish your time together, and remember to pay attention to where you are and who you're with and you'll all make it to your bright future ahead.

Want to be our next spotlight, or know of an awesome alum we should feature? Send mcdermottalumni@gmail.com an email today!

FUNDRAISING UPDATE

Celebrating a stellar year of contributions to the Alumni Association

In mid-November 2018, we kicked off our annual fundraising drive after weeks of coordinating with a team of 22 volunteers. Now, 750 emails and 540 donations later, we're excited to report that 2018 was a blockbuster year for the Association's fundraising efforts.

A record 100 alumni and 9 third-party donors generously contributed a combined \$24,911 to the Association, in addition to \$1,151 given in May to honor Mrs. McDermott. Total donations to the Alumni Association grew by \$6,328, representing a 35% increase year-over-year.

Total participation remained steady at 40%, despite our growing base of alumni. Our annual fundraising drive netted 75% of our total donations this year, a testament to the efforts taken

by our dedicated volunteers to spread the word.

The last official day of our drive saw a dead heat between the '01s, '02s, and '05s, at \$2,602, \$2,781, and \$3,070 respectively. Through online donations made during the last day of 2018 and checks that were processed early in the New Year, the class of '05 managed to pull ahead.

Their final push had them finish at \$6,365, with the '01s and '04s following at \$3,977 and \$3,730 respectively. The '05s also led in participation, with 75% of the class contributing to the fundraising effort.

We are deeply thankful to our donors for the generosity they continue to show to the Alumni Association and

McDermott Program. Your support will help us continue to find creative ways to give back to the Dallas community in the coming years.

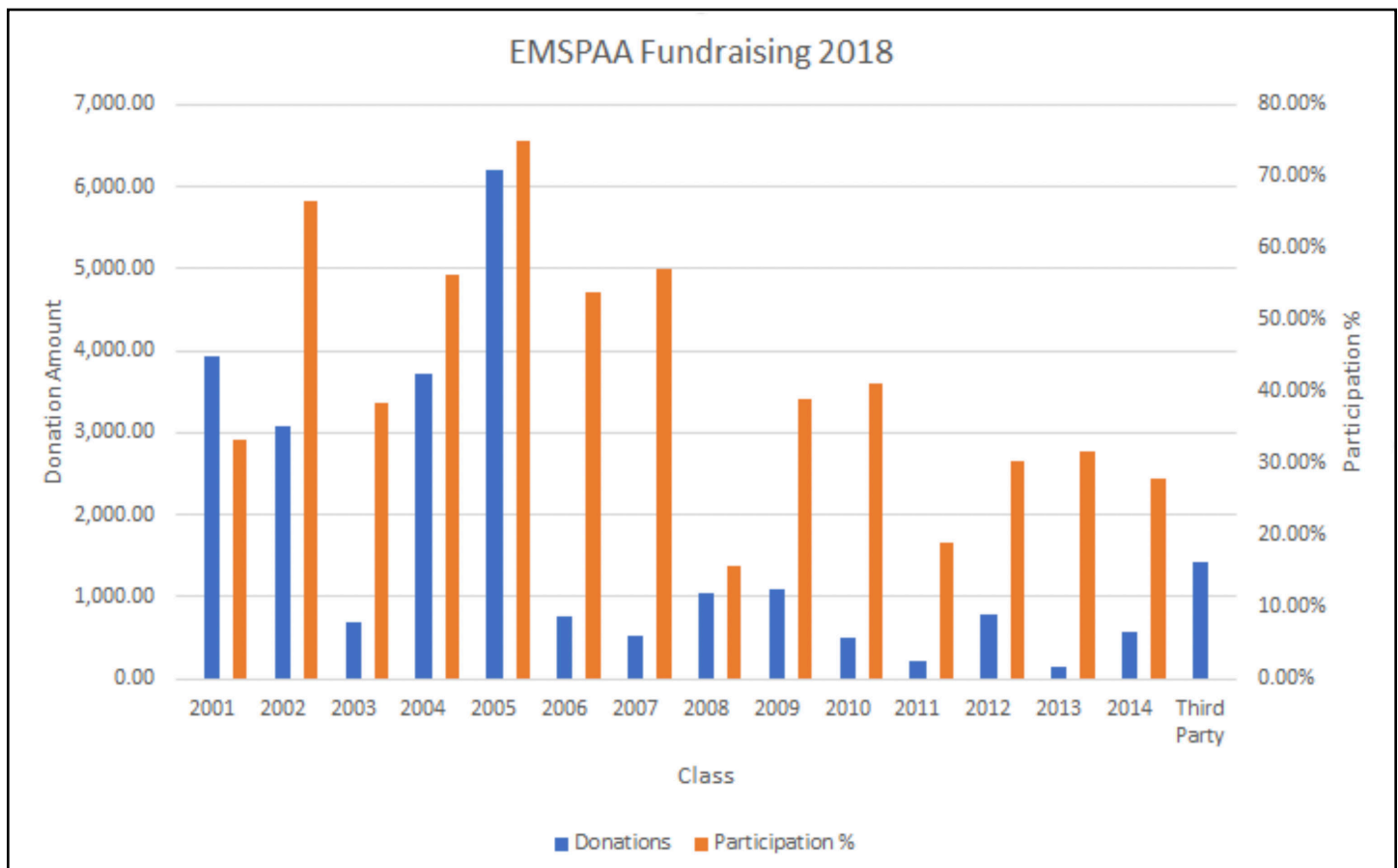
Warmly,

Sidd Sant ('12), VP of Development

You can donate or contribute to the McDermott Alumni Association in the following ways:

- [Direct donation](#) through PayPal
- [Amazon Smile](#), which donates a portion of all eligible Amazon Smile purchases to charitable organizations

Here is a look at our fundraising efforts by the numbers:



FINALISTS' WEEKEND 2019

Thank you to all the alumni who traveled to Dallas to make this year's Finalists' Weekend a success



Alumni and the class of 2015 McDermott Scholars gathered at Mary McDermott Cook's house on the Friday night of Finalists' Weekend

Every year, Finalists' Weekend comes and goes with a flurry of program and social activities. Alumni converge on Dallas from all over the country (and world!) to assist with interviews or other Finalists' Weekend needs, and also use the opportunity to catch up with old friends.

This year was no different – alumni were present throughout the entire weekend, fielding all individual interviews in pairs, sitting in on group interviews, or interacting with parents and scholars at breakfast, lunch, and dinner. That's not including the alumni who spent hours reading applicant files.

There were plenty of opportunities for alumni to socialize as well. As with previous years, Mary McDermott Cook graciously hosted the alumni and senior scholars at her home on Friday night, allowing alums to connect with the soon-to-be graduates and reconnect

with fellow alums that they had not seen in a while. After a full day of Finalists' Weekend activities on Saturday, alumni retired to People's Last Stand for happy hour. Alumni gathered again with current scholars on Sunday for a pizza party, capping off a successful weekend.

After concluding events on Sunday, the Selection Committee retreated to the McDermott Office for hours of deliberation, reviewing applications and feedback and building the next class of scholars.

While I've read applications and conducted individual interviews for several past years, I had the privilege this year to be an alumni representative on the Selection Committee. As a first-timer, I can say that the process was both challenging but insightful, especially given the strength of applicants.

I always love seeing everyone come back for Finalists' Weekend and

catching up with alumni, but am also incredibly appreciative of the amount of effort everyone – alumni, current scholars, and program staff – put into pulling off an incredible weekend. The number of alumni who make the trip back to Dallas for the weekend is a powerful testament to how keen we are on the future success and growth of the Program, and I know that commitment will run strong forever.

Offers to scholars will be going out soon, and we will keep you updated once the new class has been finalized. I am very excited for the amazing group of young men and women who will comprise the next class of McDermott Scholars, and am proud to have been a part of the process again – especially with the stellar alums I'm lucky enough to call my peers.

-- Lewis Chang ('07)