

Getting to Know ITE's 2021 Diversity Scholars

Because of generous contributions from Transoft Solutions, Econolite, and the ITE Industry and Consultants Council, ITE is able to award three Diversity Scholarships this year. We are excited to support these young people as they begin their undergraduate educations.



Gianluca Villegas

Transoft Solutions Diversity Scholar

School:
New York University

Major:
Civil Engineering



ITEJ: Tell us about yourself, your family, hobbies, and/or interests.

GIANLUCA VILLEGAS: My name is Gianluca Villegas, I'm 17 years old, and I'm from Houston, TX, USA. My family consists of my mom, Lucy; my dad, Pablo; and my younger brothers, Pavel and Allan. My parents are from Mexico, but they came to the United States searching for a better life for us. As a result, they left all of their family behind and came here relying on one another. My hobbies consist of playing my saxophone, video games, listening to music, gardening, learning Japanese, and running in my spare time.

ITEJ: How did you become interested in engineering?

VILLEGAS: I became interested in the field as I expanded my knowledge on different areas such as planting and global warming because of their impacts on the planet. I also had a strong admiration for mathematics and science, finding the application of hands-on learning being the most fascinating. As a result, I began to investigate ways to combat global warming. My focus came to civil engineering, focusing on the negative impact on the environment provoked by the misuse of urban and structural development. I then thought of looking more into renewable materials, such as carbon fiber, and how that could be implemented to help with civil engineering and other areas that could benefit from its superior utilization compared to nonrenewable materials.

ITEJ: What are you looking most forward to about going to college?

VILLEGAS: The most significant thing is to have an environment where I can learn more about engineering and its components and have the opportunity to build connections with other engineers, potentially finding internships that could provide me with experience in the field. I hope college also can help support my research with renewable materials and implement these resources to a city landscape such as the highly urban New York City.

ITEJ: How do you think the ITE Diversity Scholars Program will support you?

VILLEGAS: I will be going to my dream university with the financial support my family cannot provide, but I know that I can always rely on fellow scholars to help me out whenever I need support. Not only that, but working with individuals with similar backgrounds and ideals will prove beneficial and grow my knowledge of the engineering field.

ITEJ: How do you think being a part of ITE can help you?



VILLEGAS: Overall, the community of transportation engineers can help me brainstorm and focus on furthering my education and allow me not to find myself being alone whenever I need help with engineering. More importantly, transportation is also an avenue that would benefit significantly from renewable resources, and carbon fiber could be one of those ideas that could be implemented. It excites me to be selected as a scholarship recipient and get to involve myself in many different environments such as ITE to continue diversifying my interests.

ITE JOURNAL: Tell us about yourself, your family, hobbies, and/or interests.

XAVIER PHILLIPS: I am 18 years old, and the only child of Michael Phillips (Columbia, SC, USA) and Nicole Phillips (Washington, DC, USA). I graduated from McKinley Technology High School in Washington, DC, USA, with honors from the National Academy Foundation Engineering Academy.

Several extracurricular activities kept me busy throughout school, such as the National Honor Society, FIRST Robotics Competition Team, Architecture Construction, Engineering Mentor Program (ACE), Future Business Leaders of America, Art Club, Manga Club, LifeSmarts Team, YMCA Youth and Government, Video Game Club, Jazz Band (I play the alto saxophone), Archery Club, and the National Society of High School Scholars.

My Architecture, Construction, and Engineering (ACE) Mentor Program team was first runner-up in the Construction Industry Round Table (CIRT) National Design and Construction Competition for 2021 in the Manufacturing Center/Zone Challenge. The Boy Scouts of America also has kept me active, and I served in several leadership positions such as Senior Patrol Leader, earned the rank of Eagle Scout, and was inducted in the Order of the Arrow (The National Honor Society of the BSA). My Eagle Scout project consisted of leading a group of volunteers that included scouts, students, and adults in building wooden planter boxes to beautify my high school in time for the return of students for in-person learning.

I also was awarded the Citizenship Award for the Class of 2021 from McKinley Technology High School for service to the school and construction of the planter boxes during the pandemic.

In my free time, I enjoy playing video games, card games like Yu-Gi-Oh!, and reading books. I will attend North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University in the fall as a student in the Honors Program and the College of Engineering where I will study civil engineering.

ITEJ: How did you become interested in engineering?

PHILLIPS: I first became interested in engineering from playing with Legos and other types of build blocks as a child. Participating in extracurricular activities such as First Lego League, FIRST Robotics Competition Team, and ACE Mentor Program have exposed me to different types of engineering as well as taught me problem-solving skills. Additionally, video games like Minecraft have helped me explore some of the creative aspects of design and engineering.

ITEJ: What are you looking most forward to about going to college?

PHILLIPS: I am most looking forward to all of the experiences and opportunities that going to college will provide me. I can't wait to meet new people and learn new and exciting things.

ITEJ: How do you think the ITE Diversity Scholars Program will support you?

PHILLIPS: The ITE Diversity Scholars Program will support me by allowing me to attend college and alleviate some of the financial burdens of rising tuition costs. The ITE Diversity Scholars Program will also provide me the opportunity to explore the field of transportation engineering through networking and internships.

ITEJ: How do you think being a part of ITE can help you?

PHILLIPS: I believe being a part of ITE will allow me to network with students, professional mentors, and companies. I also believe being a part of ITE will help me grow as a leader and an innovator to become a successful engineer. I hope that being a part of ITE will help me make the place where I live better by finding creative ways to improve upon engineering.



Xavier Phillips

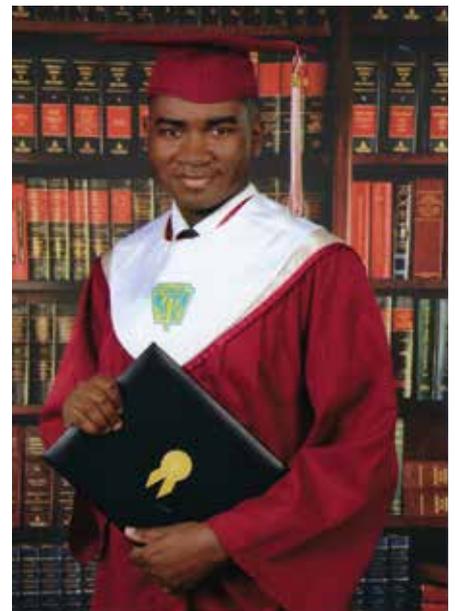
Econolite Diversity Scholar

School:

North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University

Major:

Civil Engineering





Aaron Sesay

ITE Consultants and Industry
Council Diversity Scholar

School:

University of Minnesota
–Twin Cities

Major:

Engineering

ITEJ: Tell us about yourself, your family, hobbies, and/or interests.

AARON SESAY: I recently graduated from Apple Valley High School in Apple Valley, MN, USA, where I prioritized my academics and graduated with honors, but I also was involved in a lot of school activities. In general, my activities fell under three categories: service, music, and STEM. My service activities included the Interact Club, National Honor Society, and Student Council. I liked these clubs because I love to volunteer and help others. I was even recognized with a National Community Service Awards Ambassador Award during my senior year for completing over 100 volunteer/service hours.

One of the reasons I'm passionate about helping others and solving real-world problems is because of my dad. My dad is the founder and CEO of a new nonprofit organization called FASE (Foundation for African Social Entrepreneurship). It emphasizes socially innovative solutions for sustainable development.

I developed a partnership with FASE and my Interact Club. One of the projects I started through this partnership was an annual school supply drive for Sierra Leone. With the first school supply drive, we collected enough school supplies for about 400 students in Sierra Leone. It feels great to make an impact, and that is one of the main reasons I want to study engineering.

Although I've gotten lots of fulfillment from the activities I've participated in, my family is more important, and they have been the foundation for my education as well as my spiritual and moral development. My family consists of my mom, dad, older brother, and younger sister. My older brother has autism, and he is mostly nonverbal and faces extreme behavioral challenges. This has brought challenges to my family, but we all love and support him, and he has helped us all be more patient and thoughtful people.

ITEJ: How did you become interested in engineering?

SESAY: I have been interested in activities related to STEM from a young age. I have always been fascinated with building things and playing with technology. Legos were my favorite type of toy growing up. I would have fun spending countless hours making Lego airplanes, cars, and houses. Spending time building these structures was exciting to me and gave me a sense of achievement.

Although I love STEM concepts in engineering, the aspect of engineering that is the most captivating to me is the opportunity to help others. My mom and dad were born in Ghana and Sierra Leone, respectively. I feel very connected to the culture of these countries and have always been interested in solving the problems in the impoverished areas of these countries such as food insecurity, polluted water, unequal access to education, and more using a STEM approach.

For example, in 9th grade I researched the 2017 mudslide in Sierra Leone for a school project. Over 1,000 people were killed and thousands were left homeless. I believe the effects could have been less drastic if there were more sustainable and innovative solutions/regulations put into



place by engineers in advance. The fact that engineers can solve huge real-world problems like this is intriguing to me.

ITEJ: What are you looking most forward to about going to college?

SESAY: I am looking forward to the amazing educational opportunities in college. I will get more exposure and go deeper into engineering studies because of the variety of hands-on activities I will be able to do in the advanced learning facilities. I am also looking forward to strengthening my responsibility and independence skills, as this will be my first time living away from my house for such a long time.

ITEJ: How do you think the ITE Diversity Scholars Program will support you?

SESAY: I am beyond grateful for the ITE Diversity Scholarship. I've always known that I want to go to college, but I haven't always been sure how I'd pay for it. The ITE diversity scholarship will allow me to further my studies without worries about my financial situation.

ITEJ: How do you think being a part of ITE can help you?

SESAY: Being a part of ITE will give me easy access to opportunities that I didn't know would be this accessible in college, such as internship and mentoring opportunities. As an incoming freshman pursuing a career in engineering, these sound like wonderful opportunities, and I am looking forward to being involved in them. [itej](#)

ITE's 2021 Diversity Scholars Program

The purpose of this program is to increase underrepresented populations' participation in the transportation profession by supporting increased diversity at the undergraduate level. This program is open to any U.S. high school student of African-American, Native American, Alaskan, Hawaiian, or Hispanic/Latino heritage with an interest in a career in transportation and seeking to study transportation engineering, planning, or in a related field at a school with an established ITE Student Chapter. Financing is provided through the ITE Legacy Fund.

ITE Will Begin Accepting 2022 Diversity Scholar Applications Soon

Visit the Diversity Scholars Program page at <https://www.ite.org/membership/diversity-scholars-program> to find out how eligible students can apply for the scholarships. Scholars will receive a total of up to \$20,000 in scholarship support (up to \$4,000 annually per student for up to five years of undergraduate enrollment).

Support the ITE Diversity Scholars Program

The program provides tuition assistance, mentoring, internship opportunities, and support through ITE Student Chapters for young people of African-American, Native American, Alaskan, Hawaiian, or Hispanic/Latino heritage with an interest in transportation.

For more information about our Diversity Scholars Program, please go to: <https://www.ite.org/membership/diversity-scholars-program>

100%
of your donation
will go to support
these young people.



Donate here: <https://bit.ly/DonateforDiversity>