



Scholarship Funds Help Students Achieve Their Dreams

Janai McDonald and Angelica Belica were each awarded a \$1,500 scholarship this year by the Tamarac Optimist Club. The Club recognizes two UNC Center for Urban Education students each year for their accomplishments and drive to attain their goals. The funds were added to the teacher candidates' UNC financial aid accounts and will be used to pay tuition and fees for the 2024–25 academic year.

The Optimist Club of Tamarac accepts applications from (CUE) students 18 years of age or older and awards two scholarships annually. Applicants must have completed 25% of the hours required for their degree program to apply.

CUE Director Dr. Rosanne Fulton attended the award ceremony on the CUE campus in July, along with several Optimist Club members. "Janai is wise and compassionate, and Angie is brilliant and hard-working" said Fulton. "I'm so happy for them. They did the hard work it takes to receive this award. And all of us at CUE appreciate the ongoing support of the Tamarac Optimist Club."



CUE teacher candidate and Tamarac Optimist Club scholarship recipient, Angelica Belica

Angelica Belica

Belica started her studies in August 2023 and is earning a degree in special education. She intends to teach elementary school at Indiana School for the Deaf once she finishes her degree. "I'm excited to see the smiles of my students and witness their achievements," said Belica.

Since childhood, Belica's dream has been to become a teacher. "School was always a safe haven for me, and I aspired to create the same environment for my future deaf students," said Belica.

Belica appreciates the hands-on learning opportunities at CUE. She is gaining real-world experience and applying what she learns in the classroom. Working closely with teachers also provides invaluable insights and mentorship. "Dr. Fulton is a fantastic director," Belica added.

Belica was surprised and pleased to receive the scholarship from the Optimist Club. Juggling her roles as a mom, student, and paraprofessional has been challenging. "This award will help me achieve my dream of becoming a teacher," said Belica.

Fun fact: Belica is deaf and is proud to say that she is fluent in four languages: English, Spanish, American sign language, and Mexican sign language.



CUE teacher candidate and Optimist Club of Tamarac scholarship recipient, Janai McDonald

Janai McDonald

McDonald has attended classes at CUE since spring of 2022 and is studying elementary education with a focus on liberal arts. She has always wanted to work with young people.

“I had many opportunities as a young, Black female,” said McDonald. “I have had good mentors and have been surrounded by people who pushed me to not only be successful but to find my passion along the way. I have read about the historical inequities for young students of color. I want to be the educator and leader that students can count on to help eliminate some of those barriers.”

Before she enrolled at CUE, McDonald was working and volunteering at a K-8 charter school. The executive principal Chris Denmark saw potential in McDonald and told her about CUE, where she could pursue a degree and then become a teacher. McDonald said, “After learning more about the program and meeting the amazing staff, I realized that I had a great opportunity to turn my passion into a career.”

McDonald appreciates the small class sizes and the opportunities for “intimate teamwork” at CUE. McDonald says she has direct, easy access to the professors and administrators, which is important to her. “I don’t want to be just another number in a large classroom,” said McDonald. “I want my professors to know me, especially because of my disability. I want my professors to know how I learn and encourage me to always do better.”

After she has finished her degree, McDonald wants to continue her work at Compound of Compassion, a community non-profit organization that works with young Black/Brown students. She also intends to teach at “the right school, with the right demographics, so I can help break those generational cycles and achievement gaps.” She looks forward to seeing the light bulb turn on when a young person understands something that they’ve been struggling with.

About the Optimist Club scholarship, she said, “I feel blessed and honored to have an opportunity like this. This will get me to the next level in my education.”