

**PORT JOBS**

# Alaska Airlines-Airport University Scholarships

MARCH 2017



**A PIVOTAL AND CRITICAL RESOURCE  
FOR INCUMBENT WORKERS AT  
SEATTLE-TACOMA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT**

**SkillUp**  
WASHINGTON

**PORT**  **JOBS**

## **Acknowledgments**

Port Jobs is grateful to Alaska Airlines, whose generous investment made this scholarship program available to ALL airport employees at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport. We are grateful also to the Port of Seattle for recognizing the benefit of upskilling the airport workforce and investing in Port Jobs' Airport Jobs and Airport University programs, and to Annie Laurie Armstrong of Business Government Community Connections who designed the scholarship interview tool and compiled this report.

# A Pivotal and Critical Resource for Incumbent Workers at Sea-Tac

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**I have plans to pursue my BA degree and upper level airline management.**

## Introduction

**In 2014, Alaska Airlines made a generous investment in Port Jobs' Airport University program, and established a scholarship fund open to all airport workers, regardless of employer. This scholarship program is now in its second year, and more than \$100,000 has been distributed to help airport workers pursue studies ranging from Aviation Maintenance Technology to Mechanical Engineering.**

Interviews with Port Jobs' Airport University Alaska Airlines scholarship recipients underscore the deep attachment that many have for the work environment at Sea-Tac Airport. One person who had worked at the airport for several years said that she had initially "fallen in love with" working at the airport after being employed in a summer job there. Another reported that he liked the "fast, intense environment of air cargo" and a few explained that they chose airport-connected jobs because of the associated travel benefits. Three scholarship recipients were from "airport families". The mother of one of these people had worked for the airlines for 30 years. The reflections of one person, "I like the environment – it is a whole new world" summed up the sentiments of many. Yet another scholarship recipient said her love of aviation started early, recalling how she felt as a 5 year old when an Alaska Airlines captain showed her buttons and levers used to operate the aircraft, and the flight attendant gave her souvenirs. She said, "At that moment, without knowing it my love of aviation had started." She was using her scholarship for flight training and towards earning a BA in Professional Pilot.

**There are indirect benefits to getting a scholarship, in addition to the money. Having funds removes stress, which can affect negatively health. It also frees up my time so that I don't have to "take every shift," and can explore other interests.**

All used the Alaska Airlines-Airport University scholarships as a way to pursue their education and career goals, often saying how receiving a scholarship made it possible to take prerequisites and courses required to earn different degrees and licenses.

Many explained that without the scholarships they would have been forced to delay their education, or to cut back on the number of courses they could take. For some this could mean delaying their involvement in school for a year or more. Conversely, one person said if the scholarship was not available he might be compelled to take too many courses, in order to meet the 10 credit requirement to qualify for worker retraining support. This strategy, he said, would be really difficult and likely result in poorer performance. Another person emphasized that if she had not received a scholarship she would have tried to get extra shifts, which would likely damage her school and work performance. One scholarship recipient said that if she had not received a scholarship she would have been compelled to use a credit card, adding to her already sizable education debt. Yet another person said that the scholarship "gave him confidence and ownership" in his work. One woman reported that the scholarship assistance "motivated" her because she had signed an agreement to successfully complete the course, and earn a 2.0 as a condition of receiving the award.

The scholarships provided the necessary glue for many people to patch together resources necessary to continue their education. Though modest in size (many were \$800.00) the scholarships filled a crucial gap. Oftentimes, they were combined with other loans and grants, or used for books.

The next section of this report provides a brief description of the scholarship recipient interviewees and includes information about how they used the scholarships. Some of the early results of the scholarships are described. This information will be updated over time. The comments of scholarship recipients are woven down the left column of this report, providing a snapshot of how these resources were viewed by recipients.



**I have a vision of what I want to do. Being in school is expensive. This scholarship offered a great opportunity to help pay for college. The scholarship also helped me to do well in school.**

## **MAIN FINDINGS**

### **Description of Scholarship Recipients**

The results of interviews with and data collected from 22 scholarship recipients (10 female, 12 male) revealed that the scholarships served an ethnically diverse audience, ranging in age from 21 to 59. Almost all were incumbent workers at Sea-Tac Airport. Only two were unemployed, and both had prior histories of working at the airport, and were taking time to study and find a new airport-based job. The largest scholarship recipient age group (54%) was in the 21-29 year range. That data showed that:

- 36% were immigrants and 9% refugees.
- 50% were born in the United States; other birth countries included the Philippines, China, Sudan, Belarus, India, Iraq and the Ukraine.
- 45% spoke at least one language in addition to English; examples included French, Punjabi, Arabic, Tagalog, Oromo, Russian and Ukrainian.
- The 8 persons who had moved to the United States had lived in the country for several years, ranging from 4 to 22.
- Scholarship recipients were ethnically diverse, including Caucasian (50%); Asian (13%); African (13%); African American/ Black (4%); Alaska/Pacific Islander (4%); Spanish/Hispanic/Latino (4%); other (4%); and no response (8%).
- 54% were single; 31% married; 9% divorced and 4% separated.
- Most (77%) did not have children; only five scholarship recipients had children under 18 years of age.

### **Previous Education Background**

- 36% had some college, but no degree; 36% had AA degrees, including 2 people who had earned these degrees in large part due to classes they took through Airport University, and 28% had a BA degree, including one person who earned this degree in their home country.

**I would like to be a Flight Dispatcher and continue working for the airline.**

## **Airport Jobs/Airport University Participation**

- 36% had participated in Airport University classes, and 50% had received job preparation assistance and hiring information through Airport jobs prior to applying for scholarships.

## **Employment**

- Scholarship recipients were working in order of frequency at the following companies: Delta Airlines, United Airlines, Swissport Fueling, Swissport Cargo, Alaska Airlines, Menzies, Planeware and Smart Carte.
- The types of jobs held by individuals included customer service, ramp agent, fuelers, provisioning agent, sales associate, field service tech, tower coordinator, lead ramp service agent, ramp baggage, and regional safety compliance and environmental coordinator.
- Many had a long history of working at the airport. About half had worked at the airport between 1-7 years, 37% had worked at the airport between 8 – 11 years, and 13% had worked at the airport 12 or more years.
- 50% had worked in one job at the airport, 22% had worked in 2 jobs and 4% in 3 jobs.
- Scholarship recipients earned wages, varying from \$9.47 to \$25.97 per hour. A chart showing the wage distribution is presented on the following page.

Yes, it made me think that there are people out there to help me reach my goals. I'm not left out here alone."

Wage Range at the time of application	# of Scholarship Recipients
\$ 9.00- \$10.99	2
\$11.00- \$12.99	4
\$13.00 - \$14.99	8
\$15.00 - \$16.99	2
\$17.00 - \$18.99	1
\$19.00 - \$20.99	0
\$21.00 - \$22.99	0
\$23.00 - \$24.99	0
\$25.00 - \$26.99	2
Missing	1
Not applicable	2





## Uses of Scholarships

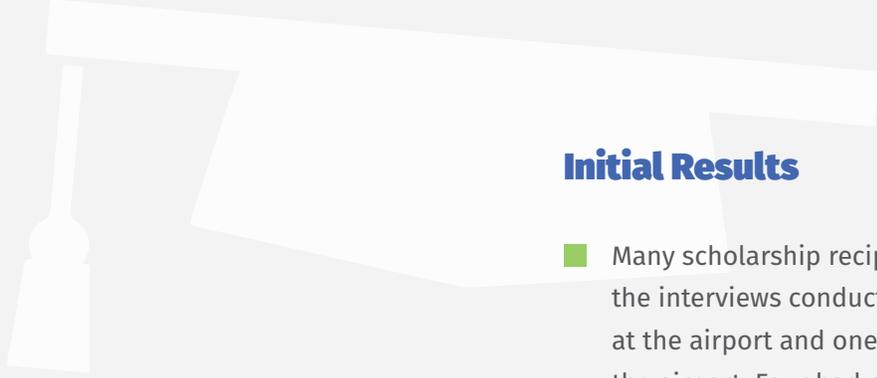
- Scholarship recipients are pursuing many different certificates, licenses and degrees. Examples include the following:
  - Certificate in Introduction to Homeland Security
  - Custom Broker training
  - Emergency Management
  - AA Degree in Global Trade and Logistics
  - AA in Hospitality and Tourism
  - Dispatch License
  - BA in Business Administration and Supply
  - Chain Management
  - Professional Pilot License
  - Security Training
  - Criminal Justice courses to be a Transportation Security Administration Officer
  - AA, BA and Advanced degrees in:
    - Criminal Justice
    - Mechanical Engineering
    - Electrical Engineering
    - Environmental Engineering
    - Finance
    - Business Management
    - General Studies
    - Information Technology
    - Education
    - Social Work

**I would not be where I'm at now without more education.**

Local community and technical colleges, universities and other out of state institutions of higher learning have been utilized by scholarship recipients. A list of places of study follows.

Name of Institution	# of Scholarship Recipients
Highline Community College	10
University of Washington - Bothell	1
University of Washington - Tacoma	1
University of Washington – Main Campus	2
South Seattle College	1
Bellevue College	1
Central Washington University – Des Moines	1
Seattle Pacific University	1
Tacoma Community College	1
North Idaho College	1
Utah Valley University	1
Sheffield School of Aeronautics in Florida	1





## Initial Results

**Yes- I send out email blasts to all of my airline's employees. I even had a co-worker funded because of it! People who want it will go after it if it's there!**

- Many scholarship recipients are still in school. At the time of the interviews conducted for this report all were still working at the airport and one had found an additional job outside of the airport. Four had experienced wage increases.
- Many are well on the way to completing coursework and degrees and some have already completed the above courses. The Grade Point Averages (GPA) of scholarship recipients is impressive and average 3.3 for the 11 students who have completed graded courses to date.
- Students are also making progress towards achieving their educational goals- many of which are focused on the airport economy. For example, one scholarship recipient graduated from the University of Washington with a BA in Technology, and two earned AA degrees, one in Hospitality and Tourism and one in Global Trade and Logistics. Two individuals finished Private Security Training at Highline College and one earned his Dispatch License.
- Some are already planning their next step career moves, and at least one-third are already in the process of seeking next step career opportunities in the airport economy, in jobs as far-reaching as working as a ticket agent, to mechanical engineering, supervisory and management jobs, and employment as a pilot.

**Yes, I am hoping to pursue a degree in education or employee assistance professional work. I am interested in Human Resources because I am the local EAP representative at my company.**

**I want to get a BA Degree and then a Master's Degree in Aviation Business Management.**

## **Summary**

Word of mouth about the Alaska Airlines scholarships is positive and strong. Scholarship applicants heard about these opportunities from Airport Jobs staff, scholarship alumni, co-workers, flyers and emails. The scholarships have benefited incumbent workers, the companies where they work, local institutions, port and regional economies. They have filled a tremendous need and are greatly appreciated by incumbent workers, many of whom have spent years, taking one class at a time while they work, making many sacrifices to save for their education.

Immediate benefits of the scholarships include improved work performance, sometimes leading to promotions. The interviews suggest that the scholarships made it more possible for people to stay in the aviation industry, because they had opportunities to progress in their careers.

The stories of persons applying for scholarships are a strong testament for these resources. As one man said, "Continuing my quest for knowledge is extremely important to me. Airport Jobs/Airport University has reignited this need for education and has provided me with an amazing opportunity for self-improvement. I am graduating with an Associate's Degree this semester, and want a BA."

The reflections of another woman mirrored the circumstances of many. She said, "Working thirty hours a week and being a full-time student has been very challenging. Having to take out student loans for tuition is something that is constantly on my mind. My parents and I make a little money to pay for daily expenses, making it impossible to pay for the tuition that is due each quarter. Earning the scholarship will not only help with financial need but also fulfill my biggest aspiration in life. Earning my degree I will have a better opportunity to move up within my airlines company, fulfilling my dream of helping others."



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