



Victoria Preciado

A Mind Is a Terrible Thing to Waste— on a Corporation

For years, America’s top corporations have successfully recruited many of the best and brightest among college students of color through an internship/scholarship program administered by the United Negro College Fund (UNCF).

Four years ago American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) President Gerald W. McEntee and UNCF officials jointly launched the United Negro College Fund Labor Scholars Program to recruit students to the labor movement.

Students can now spend two summers as an AFSCME intern—one in the field and one in headquarters—and receive up to \$10,000 in scholarships over two years.

In just four years, 36 students have had AFSCME summer internships and received scholarships totaling \$205,000. Six are already working for AFSCME and two for other unions. Many others are currently enrolled in law school or graduate study

programs, with opportunities for union jobs open to them upon graduation.

Two scholarship winners working with AFSCME are Nicholas Alexander and Victoria Preciado.

Now an organizer in California, Preciado got involved as a UCLA student in efforts to support contract workers who were trying to organize.

Both of her working-class parents toiled long and hard without union pay and benefits. Her activism at UCLA made her appreciate the huge difference unions would have meant to her own family.

Still, a job in the labor movement, which she saw as “dominated by white males” seemed out of reach to her.

But the Labor Scholars Program changed all of that from the very start.

“At orientation, people were talking to us about the importance of people of color to the future of the labor movement,” she says.

After a summer interning with an AFSCME hospital organizing campaign in Chicago—and a \$5,000 scholarship taking the sting out of her

tuition bill for her final year in school—Preciado became an organizer for Local 3299, fighting to win permanent jobs for subcontracted workers on University of California campuses.

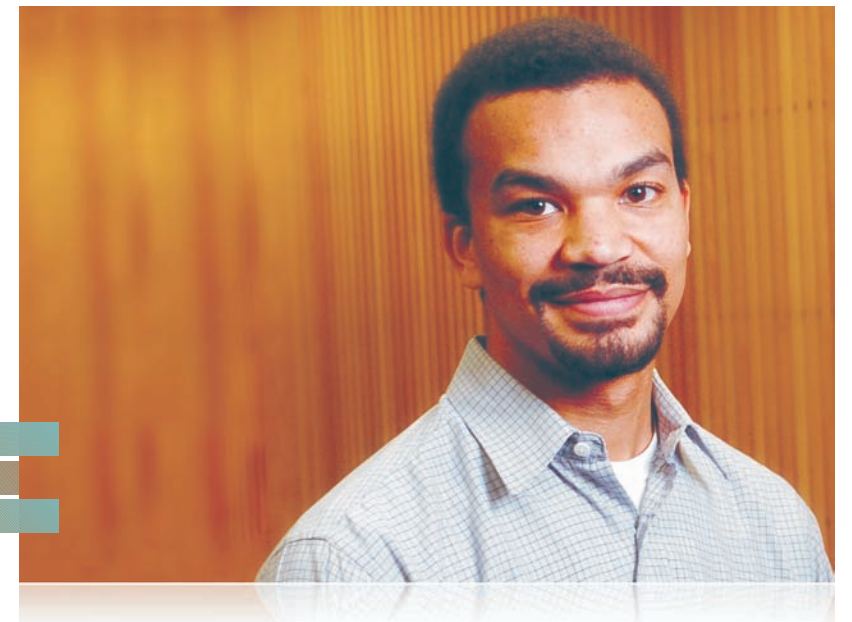
AFSCME’s program “opened the door for me,” she said. “It would have been very difficult for me to find a comfortable place in the labor movement on my own.”

Duke student Nicholas Alexander had already been involved in community organizing in North Carolina—and had interned a previous summer with a nonprofit—when he discovered the Labor Scholars Program.

“This program offered the potential for an entry-level job with an organization that has the resources to change things for the better,” says Alexander, who had been pondering how to get the experience that employers want.

His summer internship in Washington state during a contract campaign sealed his desire to work for AFSCME after graduation.

Now his job is doing strategic research and his plans are clear: “My future is in the labor movement.”



Nicholas Alexander