

# Blazing a Trail

## Abrita Kuthumi '21 named UNH's first Marshall Scholar

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Monday, December 13, 2021

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**ABRITA KUTHUMI '21 WAS RECENTLY ANNOUNCED AS A 2022 MARSHALL SCHOLAR.**

Abrita Kuthumi '21, a political science/international affairs major from Barrington, New Hampshire, is a winner of the prestigious Marshall Scholarship, one of just 41 students to earn the award in the nation, according to an announcement Monday, Dec. 13 by the British government.

Kuthumi has the added distinction of being the first Marshall Scholar in UNH's history.

The competitive scholarship offers talented young Americans — either graduating seniors or recent graduates — a scholarship to study at UK universities of their choice

for up to three years. Previous recipients include six Pulitzer Prize winners, two Supreme Court justices, a NASA astronaut and 14 MacArthur Fellows.

“We are so very proud of Abrita for earning this scholarship, and for following her passions in a way that puts her among the most elite students in the country in terms of their academic prowess and leadership potential,” says UNH President James W. Dean, Jr.

Kuthumi is among nine students from New England to receive the scholarship this year. Her peers are from Ivy League schools such as Princeton, Harvard and Dartmouth, as well as private schools such as Amherst College, MIT and Williams.

Kuthumi immigrated from Nepal with her family when she was 10, yet she continued to reflect on the inequalities between education systems. As a UNH undergrad, she spent two summers studying in South Korea through the U.S. State Department’s Critical Language Scholarship program, which introduced her to a country where literacy has factored into economic development. An internship with the State Department’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs started her thinking about how educational programs could transform developing nations. Back on campus, she served as a research assistant, orientation leader to international students, a CONNECT mentor, diversity ambassador and a COLA student fellow. Her commitment to a public service career in international development, her academic achievement and her leadership potential earned her a [2020 Harry S. Truman Scholarship](#).

## WHAT IS THE MARSHALL SCHOLARSHIP?

Named for Secretary of State George C. Marshall, the [Marshall Scholarship Program](#) began in 1953 as a gesture of gratitude to the people of the United States for the assistance that the UK received after World War II under the Marshall Plan.

In the UK, Abrita will spend a year earning a master’s in international education and development from the University of Sussex, and then a second year earning a master’s in South Asian area studies from The School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at the University of London. After that, she plans to gain professional experience in South Asia by applying for a Luce Fellowship, Fulbright or signing up for the Peace Corps. She hopes to become a foreign service officer with USAID, working in educational programs for girls and people with disabilities in South Asia.

“I’m especially interested in inclusivity for women and disabled individuals in terms of having the access to education, especially when it comes to literacy. I’m someone who believes in the power of reading and writing and how much it can change a person’s life,” says Kuthumi, who notes that while U.S. literacy rate is around 99%, in some South Asia countries it’s as low as 60%. “I’m really excited to have this opportunity, and to dive into the academic programs at both of these institutions.”

Jeanne Sokolowski, director of the [UNH Office of National Fellowships](#), says the prestige of this award can’t be understated. “The Marshall Scholars program is enshrined in an act of British Parliament, so that’s how significant it is, that the British government wanted it to continue in perpetuity.” She notes that while the selection

committee is on the lookout for academic excellence, the program is about much more than class rank and grades.

“They are also seeking applicants who are leaders, who can act as cultural ambassadors and make a positive impression in the UK, who will integrate into their local communities, and establish longstanding ties with the people they meet.”

She notes that students must be nominated by their institution, which speaks to how highly UNH faculty and staff think of Kuthumi.

One of those faculty members is [Assistant Professor Madhavi Devasher](#), who first met Kuthumi in her U.S. in world affairs course in the spring of 2019, and stayed in touch throughout 2020, as Kuthumi took two more classes with Devasher, comparative government and comparative identity politics. Devasher says she learned more about Kuthumi’s interest in South Asia, international development and international education.

“Abrita is thoughtful, highly motivated and persistent,” says Devasher. “She is not the student who raises her hand at every opportunity; rather she tends to wait until the end of a lecture to ask a complex question that gets to the heart of the issues we discussed.”

Devasher says she hopes other students see Kuthumi’s success as an example of what they might achieve. “I hope it encourages more UNH students to apply for highly competitive fellowships, graduate programs or other opportunities. I sometimes worry that our students undersell themselves,” she says. “We have excellent, hard-working and talented students at UNH who should aim high and as Abrita’s example shows, when you work hard for something, you can achieve a lot.”

President Dean agrees. “Abrita serves as an example to all of our current and future students that there are no limits to what they might accomplish. ”

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**SCHOLARSHIPS**



University of New Hampshire

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