



CELEBRATING GRADUATES



COLLEGE
POSSIBLE™
OREGON

Welcome to the College Possible Family

Hello,

Thank you for taking a step to find out more about College Possible — we're so glad you did. Included in the pages that follow are a few stories from our college graduates. I hope you enjoy reading them as much as I did. These students began with College Possible during their junior year of high school. They made a commitment to their future when they were just 16 years old, and stuck with us, and their education, for six more years until they graduated from college with their bachelor's degrees.

We've also included some data and findings from students who graduated from college and our program many years ago from other College Possible sites throughout the country to show you just how profound an impact a college degree can have on a person.

If these stories pique your interest, I encourage you to take another step with College Possible. I invite you to support our students, believe in their abilities and come along with us as we help Oregon students get to college graduation.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Emielle Nischik". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Emielle Nischik
Executive Director

From Student to Coach

by Salvador Garcia Lopez

*Reynolds High School, '15
Portland Community College, '17
Western Oregon University, '20*



Before joining College Possible, I had no idea how I was going to apply for college.

I knew I wanted to go to college, but I didn't know the process of doing it all from taking the ACT, to filing the FAFSA, and applying for scholarships. I was nervous because no one from my family had gone to college before me so they couldn't help me with the college application process.

I wanted a resource that was going to help me get to college and after attending a College Possible information session back in 2013, I knew I wanted this program to help me because the staff were very friendly and approachable, and all the students that were there were motivated to go to college. **What kept me involved with College Possible were the coaches who were super encouraging throughout my college journey.** They introduced me to opportunities like enrichment programs during the summers, scholarships and asked me to speak at two College Possible student events. Those events were opportunities to meet people from other schools and for soon-to-be College Possible college students to know what college is like as a College Possible student.

I first attended Portland Community College and my coach fully supported my decision after we talked about my finances. **After two years at PCC, I transferred to Western Oregon University — and my college coach was with me from start to finish.** She helped me decide after she encouraged me to look in-depth at the financial aid packages, course catalogs, and consider what I wanted out of a college, which was a small class size environment.

In total, I ended up having six coaches throughout my time with College Possible. They were all super helpful and were all people who I was comfortable going to for help. **To me, my coaches were like older siblings that attended college who I could go to for help or advice about finances, getting involved or difficult classes.** I'm still in contact with most of them to this day.



Our graduates are financially stable.

Five-year grads reported a median individual income of \$40-59,999 and over a third of 10-year grads have family incomes of \$100,000 or more.

My College Possible coaches taught me to never give up and that it's OK to fail as long as you learned something from it because that failure then becomes a lesson which helps in the long run. They were there for me when I got rejected from colleges, didn't win scholarships, wasn't chosen for jobs, or failed an exam. Their words of encouragement kept me pushing forward with a positive mindset. I've had coaches be my references for countless jobs and also had a coach who helped me apply for a credit builder program even after her term of service was over. Recently, a previous coach of mine helped me find a place to live in Philadelphia by putting me in contact with people she knows. My coaches have continued to be a support system to me even after they have completed their term of service.

I am currently getting ready to move across the country to become a College Possible senior high school coach in Philadelphia. After completing my term of service, I plan on going to graduate school to get a master's in education to begin my career goal of being a high school science teacher. Having a bachelor's degree gets me one step closer toward achieving my goal of being a teacher. **I believe that by earning this degree I will have more opportunities for employment, which will help me get my family and me out of poverty.**

A Dream Passed Down

by Liz Garcia

*David Douglas High School, '15
Mount Hood Community College, '17
Portland State University, '20*



I don't ever remember thinking about whether I would go to college or not. I think as soon as I knew what college was, I knew I would be going.

I knew this for a couple of reasons. One reason was I did well in school. I also liked school. These things meant I could probably do well in pursuing higher education. However, the biggest reason was that I am a daughter of first-generation immigrants. My grandparents worked hard to give my parents a life in the States. Still, college was not accessible for my parents. So this dream of pursuing a degree was passed down to me, as well as my sibling and some of my cousins. **Being the child of immigrants, I know the significance of education and its correlation to finding a career that allows for a better standard of living.** My grandparents and parents have had to work many jobs that don't offer any professional development or room for moving up, a lot of the jobs they have worked have also been physically demanding. I wanted to pursue a degree in order to set a good foundation for my career and life, but also so I could fulfill the family dream. In addition, a college degree meant having more financial stability in my future, and for me that meant that I could give back to my parents and family one day. So by high school, I had no doubt in my mind I would be going to college.

However, choosing to go to college didn't mean I knew how to get there. Being the first in my family to pursue a college education, I wasn't sure exactly where to begin. This is why I wanted to join College Possible and why I am glad that I did to this day. From the preparation for the

application process to exiting college and finding a job, my coaches were there to guide me. I am forever grateful for the help of College Possible. I had great people encouraging me. It made my experience in applying for school and finishing school much more manageable. Thinking



Graduates found College Possible helpful in setting them on the path to college.

Eighty-six percent of Alumni Survey respondents found College Possible “very” or “extremely” helpful in navigating the college application and enrollment process.

about it now, I wonder what it would have been to go through the whole process on my own. Without a doubt, it would have been more difficult. I can imagine that it can be overwhelming for some. I have seen others struggle and even drop out because the process was too much for them to manage alone.

Thankfully, I never once thought of giving up because I had the support of those around me, including folks at College Possible.

Originally, I had hoped to attend Linfield College. At the time, I was thinking about majoring in journalism and Linfield has a journalism department. **I had financial aid, which included grants, scholarships and loans. Unfortunately, it still did not cover the full cost.** My parents wanted to help me see it through so much that they were willing and ready to get a parent loan as well.

I wanted the full college experience. Living in the dorms. Experiencing the campus life. But my parents still had my sister to get through college.

I did not think it was right or fair to put my parents in debt or to use up resources my sister might need later on just to get something I wanted. In the end, a college degree is a college degree and that was what I was really set on obtaining. **So I enrolled at Mt. Hood Community College and completed my associate degree. From there I went on to transfer to Portland State University.** In all honesty, if I could go back and do it over, I would do it just the same. My college journey led me to opportunities and people that I cannot imagine my life without now. Furthermore, reflecting on that decision now, I am glad I made the choice

to start at a community college and then to transfer to Portland State University. I completed my degree with a manageable amount of debt, an amount I easily could have accumulated in two years at a private college or university.

As I mentioned earlier, a college degree is a college degree. I believe that whether you have a bachelor's degree from an Ivy League school or public university, the value is the same. Pairing real applicable experience with your degree is what changes the value. I believe having my degree has increased my earning power, especially in the times we are living in now. Prior to finishing school, I had been applying to many companies and organizations, unfortunately many of these places began notifying me that they were putting hiring processes on hold due to COVID-19. I continued my search for a permanent job. Recently I accepted a position as a principal assistant at an elementary school and with my degree and experience I was able to earn a higher wage. **Now that I am setting out on my adult life and career, the value of my degree will help me not only financially, but it will give me a leg up in the professional world.** Completing my degree meant I had fulfilled a dream that has been passed down to me by my family.



High school students on a campus visit at Portland State University.

Our graduates have high rates of civic and philanthropic engagement.



Eighty-seven percent of alumni survey respondents reported voting in the 2016 presidential election, notably higher than the 51% estimated turn-out rate of eligible millennial voters.



Seventy percent of respondents contributed monetarily to a charity.



Sixty-two percent reported volunteering in the past year, compared to the 39% estimated rate of volunteerism for college-educated adults in the U.S.

“ I’m currently working for the City of Portland. My long-term goal for my career is to continue giving back to my community and advocating for not just Portland, but for Pacific Islanders and the BIPOC [Black, Indigenous and People of Color] community. I’m just trying my best to make sure we have a seat at the table, and if we don’t, to bring a seat so that other BIPOC folks can share their voices. Ultimately, I would like to see myself in a classroom and teaching at least at one point in my life. For right now, I can see myself staying in government for the next couple of years so that I can learn more about what resources are available and how to better advocate for my community. ”



Herico Aiten

*Reynolds High School, '15
Portland State University, '19*



\$1 Million, Three Years, More Dreams Realized

The Getting to Graduation — Leadership Circle is a group of investors who are committed to education equity and are willing to make a commitment of \$3,000 or more. It's time to do better. Together, we can make college dreams possible for more students in Oregon.

Thank you to our current Leadership Circle members:

Anonymous

Stephanie Fowler and Irving Levin

Clark Haass and Kate DiSalle

James F. and Marion L.

Miller Foundation

The Renaissance Foundation

Jennifer Schubert and

John Urang

Marta and Ken Thrasher

Christine and Dave Vernier

We invite you to join this group!

Contact Elena Hein, EHein@CollegePossible.org to find out more.

“ I have the skills to do this, so I think having my bachelor’s degree allows me to say, ‘hey I worked hard for four years in order to be here.’ I think the degree is just that extra thing to show for yourself, to prove I have the skills, I have the education to support the community I want to work in. ”



Fama Gedi

*David Douglas High School, '15
University of Oregon, '19*

Our graduates are employed, have health insurance and are saving for retirement.

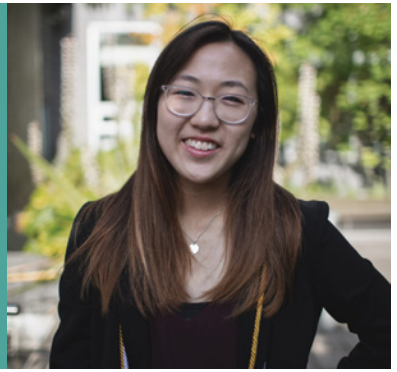
College Possible graduates have a 98% employment rate, 94% have health insurance and 83% are saving for retirement.



Untapped Potential

by Janell Kim

*David Douglas High School, '16
Washington University, '20*



It was back-to-school night around the beginning of my junior year at David Douglas High School, and my mom and I had just finished picking up my fall schedule and meeting some of my new teachers.

We rounded the corner where we came upon the college and career readiness designated location in the hallway in front of the gym. Eager to get home and hoping to avoid any more conversations, I stared at the floor as I quickly ushered my mom down the hall. Halfway through the hallway bustling full of people, my mom stopped me and pointed to a table that flickered green and white in the corner of my eyes. “Why don’t you take a quick look at that table?” I lifted my eyes and saw the big green words “College Possible” strewn across a white banner. **Even though I did not have any concrete plans or even ideas for college, as a teacher’s pet, perfectionist, and achiever, I felt drawn to the table.** The coach at the table quickly gave me the appropriate information and encouraged me to sign up, so I did. I did not realize what that one sheet of paper held in store for my future.

I attended College Possible twice a week for that entire year; if I remember correctly, it was every Monday and Wednesday after school. It was there that I entertained the thought of going to a 4-year university as we spent grueling hours preparing for the ACT. **During our time together, my first College Possible Coach Maggie quickly recognized the potential that I had** by looking at my grades, course schedule, and extracurricular activities and she encouraged me to apply for summer enrichment programs. I had never heard of summer enrichment programs prior to her mentioning them, and we started to look for different opportunities that I was eligible for. Together, we came across

a program called LEDA, or Leadership Enterprise for a Diverse America. This program was for high-achieving, low-income high school juniors and its aim was to provide access to higher education to students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. I completed



Our graduates are not buried in undergraduate debt.

Nearly one in five survey respondents graduated from college debt-free. Over a third reported a debt-load of \$10,000 or less, and on average, respondents left college with less debt than their non-College Possible peers.

my application with Maggie's guidance and support as she edited my application and wrote one of my letters of recommendation. During the process and after submitting my application, imposter syndrome kicked in and I doubted that I would ever even hear back. **But Maggie never doubted me.**

After passing round one of applications, an interview, and round two of applications, I finally received the email that said "Congratulations—LEDA Cohort 11 Welcomes You." **This acceptance illuminated to me the potential that Maggie knew was in me but that I could not see in myself before.** I was able to attend this free, seven-week intensive program at Princeton University where I received ACT Preparation, extensive leadership training, and college guidance and partook in a college writing course taught by a Columbia University writing professor. Because of this program that I was led to through College Possible,

I was able to apply to ten colleges at absolutely no cost and eventually ended up attending Washington University in St. Louis for free. I graduated from WashU in May 2020 with a degree in Educational Studies with a minor in Psychology.

Words cannot describe how thankful I am for having had the privilege and experience of participating in College Possible during my time in high school. **College Possible opened my eyes to my own potential.** College Possible also exposed me to the larger, inequitable, and oppressive systems at work that permeates our society, particularly in

higher education access, and disadvantage students from particular backgrounds, ultimately affecting future employment and predicted income and life outcomes. As such, my experience in College Possible, coupled with my passion for education, has me now working as a college adviser through another AmeriCorps program called College Advising Corps. The mission of College Advising Corps is similar to that of College Possible: to increase the number of low-income, first-generation, and underrepresented high school students who enter and complete higher education. I am excited to join in this work, and I am forever grateful for the positive impact that College Possible has had on my life.

“ Words cannot describe how thankful I am for having had the privilege and experience of participating in College Possible during my time in high school. **College Possible opened my eyes to my own potential.** ”

“ I finished my undergraduate degree with a 3.5 GPA and am continuing with school to earn my master’s in education to become a middle school teacher.

Everyone deserves the ability to go to college and be successful and College Possible has done more than enough for me while also providing some levity during what can be a stressful time for anyone. ”



Jesus Nunez

*Sam Barlow High School, '16
Portland State University, '20*

More than one in four of alumni survey respondents have earned an advanced degree.

Twenty-nine percent have earned either a master’s degree or doctorate, and that figure jumps to 50% when 10-year graduates are considered separately.



Take another step with College Possible.

INVEST IN FUTURE COLLEGE GRADUATES

CollegePossible.org/Donate

GIVE THIS TO A FRIEND!

Pass on these stories to someone who might be interested in learning more about education equity and the work that College Possible is doing.

JOIN OUR EMAIL LIST

CollegePossible.org/Email

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA

 College Possible

 @CollPossibleOR

 College Possible

VOLUNTEER

We have a variety of in-person and virtual volunteer opportunities available throughout the year, like supporting family engagement workshops, one-on-one coaching with high school seniors, and being a leader on our Ambassador Board.

For more information, email **Christina Carl**,
CCarl@CollegePossible.org.

GET INVOLVED



College Possible is making college admission and success possible for students from low-income backgrounds through an intensive curriculum of coaching and support.

Learn more: CollegePossible.org/Oregon