

Enslaved Ancestors Scholarship Questions and Answers

Thank you for contacting us about the Enslaved Ancestors College Access Scholarship Program at the University of Virginia. UVA seeks to remember the enslaved people whose labor and talents made possible the construction and operation of the Academical Village. For this reason, we are grateful when students who are the descendants of enslaved laborers at UVA share the stories of their ancestors with us.

We hope the following questions and answers will be helpful, and we welcome advice about how we can make this resource more helpful to students and family members.

What is the Enslaved Ancestors College Access Scholarship Program?

This program was created under [§ 23.1-615.1](#) of the Code of Virginia and under [guidance](#) provided by the State Council for Higher Education in Virginia (SCHEV). In the words of [§ 23.1-615.1](#), the program aims to provide “a tangible benefit ... for individuals ... with a demonstrated historic connection to slavery that will empower families to be lifted out of the cycle of poverty.” Towards this end, the program provides scholarships to one or more students each year who are enrolled in degree or certificate programs at UVA. To set priorities for the program, identify Scholars, and establish processes that honor the legacies of enslaved ancestors and their descendants, UVA collaborates with the [Descendants of Enslaved Communities at UVA \(DEC-UVA\)](#), an independent, non-profit, self-determined organization.

Who is eligible for the scholarship?

According to [SCHEV guidance](#), Scholars must:

- Be Virginia residents as defined by Virginia Code [§ 23.1-502](#) through [§ 23.1-505](#)
- Demonstrate membership in a community that continues to experience the negative legacy of slavery in Virginia or demonstrate a personal and historic connection to slavery in Virginia;
- Intend to begin, continue, or complete education at UVA.

For the purpose of the scholarship, the [guidance](#) offers the following definitions:

- *An “enslaved individual,” in the historical context, is any person who was deemed property of the institution or was forbidden to quit their service for another person or corporate entity. An enslaved individual, in the historical context, may have been placed under this condition of servitude due to indebtedness, military defeat, having a parent who was enslaved, and in most cases for Native Americans and Africans through forcible removal from their native community, or forced in-place enslavement of entire communities.*
- *“Experiencing the negative legacy of slavery” means social and economic conditions born out of the institution of slavery which negatively impact an individual’s ability to fairly achieve in society. This negative legacy may include, but is not limited to, economic inequality and limited access to communal networks of assistance and technology and inadequate funding of K-12 education.*

UVA policy requires that all scholarship recipients maintain [satisfactory academic progress](#) in order to renew their scholarships from year to year.

What are the priorities for the scholarship?

UVA and DEC-UVA have agreed to prioritize the scholarships in this order:

- Students who are direct descendants of ancestors enslaved on an estate or property currently or previously owned by UVA, or of ancestors enslaved on an estate or property owned by those who helped finance and found UVA.
- Other students who demonstrate membership in a community that continues to experience the negative legacy of slavery in Virginia or a personal and historic connection to slavery in Virginia.

Newly enrolling undergraduate students, whether first year or transfer, receive priority, followed by returning undergraduate students. New and returning students in certificate or degree programs in the School of Continuing and Professional Studies also are eligible, as are students enrolled in graduate and professional programs.

What does the scholarship cover?

Scholarships for residential undergraduate students currently cover the full standard [cost of attendance](#). The amount is subject to change and may vary from Scholar to Scholar. The availability of scholarships and the amount of each scholarship is subject to the availability of funding.

How may I be considered for the scholarship?

Students may share information regarding their eligibility through this link. Information for the scholarship for the 2024-2025 academic year will be due by April 15, 2024. UVA will make every effort to award scholarships, subject to the availability of funds, no later than May 15, 2024. Everyone who shares information will receive a response.

What information may I share?

UVA recognizes that ancestors who were enslaved were not in possession of basic human rights and that written records often sought to deprive them of their identities and personhood. We also recognize that recovering the power, legacy, and weight of this lineage, while restorative, can also be difficult and painful. For these reasons, UVA will be grateful for any information students feel comfortable sharing, wherever they might be in exploring their ancestry. Information may include, for example, materials accessible in the University of Virginia archives, family papers/letters, oral histories, Historical Society records, church records, obituaries, books, photographs, and/or genealogical research. Students may also share additional information from year to year as they learn more.

Once I've shared information about my ancestors, what will happen?

UVA will consult with DEC-UVA and with UVA faculty and staff members who specialize in research into, and memorialization of, people who labored in enslavement at UVA or on properties controlled by UVA or its founders. Although we may need to ask for additional information, we will always do so with respect for students, their families, and their ancestors.

How will the scholarships be awarded?

A review committee consisting of UVA faculty and staff and representatives from DEC-UVA and other descendant groups will review eligible students and recommend recipients. If the number of eligible students exceeds the number of scholarships, the committee will weigh equally academic achievement, cocurricular achievement, and demonstrated capacity to advance the goals of [§ 23.1-615.1](#) of the Code of Virginia.

If I don't receive the scholarship, may I try again?

Yes. If students discover more ties to their ancestry throughout their UVA careers, they are welcome to share additional information through the process and on the timeline described above.

Do I need to apply for financial aid in order to be considered?

No. UVA welcomes information from students who think they are eligible for the scholarship regardless of their financial need.

How will the scholarship affect need-based aid?

The scholarship will replace need-based aid that UVA or the Commonwealth of Virginia would otherwise provide. Scholars who qualify for federal Pell Grants through the Free Application for Student Aid (FAFSA) will continue to receive those grants.

How will the scholarship affect other scholarships?

To ensure that all students have the financial resources they need, UVA limits its total scholarship support to the student's cost of attendance. If a student is receiving another UVA scholarship—for example, the University Achievement Award—then the Enslaved Ancestors Scholarship will replace that scholarship.

If a student is receiving an outside scholarship—that is, a scholarship not funded by UVA—then the student may be able to continue to receive that scholarship, if allowed by the terms of the outside scholarship. For example, if an outside scholarship limits a student's total funding to the cost of attendance, then the student may not be able to retain the outside scholarship.