



Daniel West

2011 Scholarship Recipient



Daniel West (cohort of 2011) receiving the 2017 Distinguished Alumnus Award.

“Somehow, I found my way back to DC. Back to where it all began.”

Perhaps it was due to his mother’s hard work to keep the burden of poverty off of her children, but it would take Daniel West until adolescence to fully comprehend his family and community’s economic circumstances. The West family eventually settled in the southeast quadrant of Washington, D.C. in a home—described by Daniel as a safe haven—created by his mother in an attempt to shelter her three children from the sights of poverty that surrounded them.

“If you stepped into my mother’s home, you would have thought it was [...] somewhere down by the waterfront. It was a place that was drastically different than what was there outside. I’m really grateful that we had that safe haven metaphorically, as well as literally.”

By middle school, Daniel had acquired a certain awareness for the intricate workings of the poverty cycle. In his teenage years, he engaged in service projects, not just identifying the economic corrosion that marred his neighborhood, but also the absence of a path toward self-sufficiency and success that could serve to combat such corrosion.

“The communities I lived in and saw lacked a lot of access to vital, necessary resources. [...] Not only were they disconnected from healthcare, access to jobs, and banking, they were disconnected from all these things that make you a functioning citizen in society.”

In reflecting upon his life and those of others, Daniel believes the search for pathways—avenues by which to actively pursue personal decisions and experience growth—has always been a common theme. He strongly advocates for the pursuit of non-traditional approaches that “cater to [the students] and their needs,” and insists that the David M. Rubenstein/Economic Club of Washington D.C. Scholarship Program—by providing disadvantaged youth with intimate support during their pursuit of higher education—has exemplified that cause. Daniel also stresses the importance of designing support systems—much like the Economic Club’s scholarship, internship, and mentoring programs—that place equal emphasis on monetary aid and investment in personal and professional development.

A recent graduate of the University of Pennsylvania’s Master’s Program in International Educational Development, Daniel is incorporating his upbringing and education into his role as a college and career coordinator for District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS). He was previously based in Boston as a program

manager at Jobs For the Future—a national nonprofit organization dedicated to providing technical assistance and convening major stakeholders around career pathways, training models, professional development, and systems reform as it pertains to low-income populations. As a former Bonner Scholar, he has completed approximately 1,500 hours of education-related community service for the Bonner Foundation. While Daniel has been the recipient of numerous community service and merit-based scholarships, he finds the Economic Club’s support for its scholars to be unique, in that it extends well beyond that which is traditionally provided by scholarship foundations.

“The Economic Club came in and provided support during my transition from high school to college. Not only did they provide monetary support, but they continually invested in seeing my personal development. They would check up on me at least once or twice every year, wanting to know about my progress. Even after I finished at Morehouse College [his undergraduate alma mater], being connected to the Economic Club helped me realize—as I’m walking along my route—the things that are most important to keep at the forefront.”

Being associated with the Economic Club catalyzed a series of events that culminated in a strong relationship between Daniel and his future employer, DCPS. At the Economic Club’s 2017 Scholarship Ceremony—during which he was presented with the Club’s first Distinguished Alumnus Award—Daniel had the opportunity to interact with one of the ceremony’s guests, DCPS Chancellor Antwan Wilson. Chancellor Wilson offered advice and implored him to bring his services and talent back to Washington, D.C. Heeding the Chancellor’s suggestions, Daniel reached out to Kimberly Hanauer, Director of College Preparedness Programs at DCPS, who was also present at the Scholarship Ceremony. Ms. Hanauer eventually emerged as an advocate on his behalf during the rigorous hiring process. A product of DCPS himself, Daniel cited his “personal connection to the work and to making sure these students succeed” as reasons for his return—albeit in a different capacity—to a public school system he believes has potential to “operate at its utmost efficiency.”

Even before being offered his current job, Daniel was struck by the commitment of the Economic Club, whose members provided scholars and alumni with the means to establish their own connections years down the road. During his acceptance speech for the Distinguished Alumnus Award, Daniel spoke of “carrying a torch,” one he hopes will be passed on to future Economic Club scholars. Upon reaching the end of his speech, Daniel left the audience with an inspirational quote from Benjamin Elijah Mays:

“It is not a disgrace not to reach the stars, but it is a disgrace to have no stars to reach for. Not failure, but low aim is sin.”

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