

# Generation to *Generation* Excellence in Medicine

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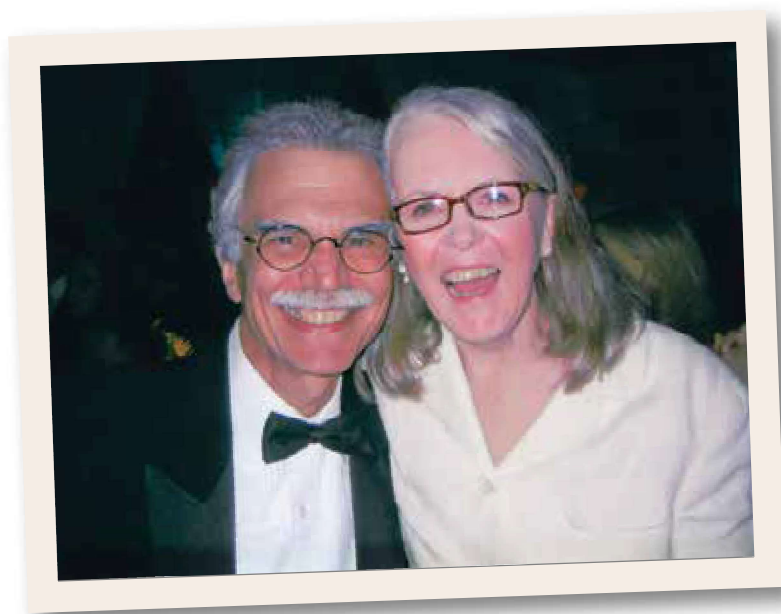
## Record-Breaking Campaign Delivers Life-Changing Support for Future Physicians

Blau Scholarship recipients  
Michelle Robbins '27,  
Jackson Bright '28, Mack  
Ogden '28, Brianna  
Rheaume '27, Jonathan  
Rismany '28, Gianna  
DeRoberts '28, and  
Christian Poblano '27





When Pat Blau reviewed the applications of prospective scholarship recipients from the Upstate Medical Alumni Foundation, she knew she was about to change lives. The widow of Stephen Blau, MD '68, a psychiatrist who practiced for more than 50 years, was preparing to distribute a transformative gift: 11 full-ride scholarships that would eliminate a year of medical school debt for a cohort of medical students with substantial financial need.



Stephen Blau, MD '68 and his wife, Pat, met while both were studying in Syracuse, he in medical school at Upstate and she at Syracuse University.

The impact of that gift was immediate and profound.

When Stephanie Ezeoke '28 first received the scholarship notification email, she thought it was a scam. It wasn't until she received a follow-up email that she understood it was real. "I had to take a moment to collect myself," she says. "Then I called my mother and grandmother."

Christian Poblano '27 was on a break during his psychiatry rotation at Binghamton General Hospital when he opened the email. "I thought there was a typo and the alumni office accidentally added an extra 0," he says.

Gianna DeRoberts '28, was heading to a wedding when she quickly checked her email. "I opened the attachment, and I just stood there, mouth open," she says. Her boyfriend, Jackson Bright '28, wondered why she had stopped responding to their conversation.

Bright had also received an email from the

Medical Alumni Foundation but hadn't read it. "You might want to open it," she told him.

These Upstate medical students had just been notified that they'd been selected to receive the Stephen Blau, MD '68 Memorial Scholarship, which would cover the cost of their medical school tuition and living expenses for the 2025-26 year.

Blau's million-dollar gift represents the capstone of the Generation to Generation campaign, an ambitious fundraising effort that has not only exceeded its original goals but has also fundamentally changed how Upstate Medical University supports its students. What began as a \$15 million campaign is now expected to surpass \$25 million, creating a new standard for alumni giving and establishing a sustainable foundation for future generations of physicians.

Blau's decision to fund immediate scholarships rather than an endowment reflects her desire to see substantial, immediate impact. Her connection to Upstate is personal—she met her future husband, Stephen, in a bank on Marshall Street while she was attending Syracuse University's School of Social Work, and he was a medical student.

The couple eloped after Pat's graduation in 1969, and Stephen went on to practice psychiatry, maintaining a psychoanalytic practice while teaching medical students at Albert Einstein College of Medicine. Pat worked as a social worker for more than 40 years, including 30 years at Bellevue Hospital. After her husband died in 2024, Pat thought about a tangible way to honor his memory.

"With both of our backgrounds in health-care, it made sense to help future physicians, particularly since we have a shortage of doctors and medical education now costs a fortune," she says.

## The Burden of Modern Medical Education

Indeed, medical education costs have skyrocketed in ways that would have been unimaginable to earlier generations of physicians. At Upstate's Norton College of Medicine, tuition has increased from \$16,000 annually in 2000 to \$46,470 today, with the yearly cost of attendance estimated at \$82,323 for New York residents. The average debt for graduates commonly tops \$200,000 at graduation, a burden that grows with compound interest that begins with residency.



Herb '65 and Suzy Weinman at Reunion 2015 with scholarship recipient Rachel Kopicki, MD '16

The financial stress weighs heavily on current students. “As someone financing their medical school education primarily through loans, it can be daunting to watch the debt accumulate,” says Khristy Tapiero '28, another recipient of a Blau Scholarship.

Recent legislation that caps federal loans for professional education at \$50,000 annually adds additional stress. “If that bill went into effect and impacted me, I would be capped out and forced to drop out of medical school,” says Michelle Robbins '27, another Blau recipient. “There is no back up plan for me.”

These are financial worries earlier generations of medical graduates did not have to balance along with their medical study. “Over and over, I hear how comparatively little it cost our older alumni physicians to obtain their medical education,” says Paul Norcross, executive director of the Upstate Medical Alumni Foundation. “Many of them worked their way through school, paying their tuition with side jobs, and they’re grateful for the successful careers and comfortable lives that their Upstate education provided for them and their families.”

Herbert Weinman, MD '65, who practiced family medicine for decades in New Paltz, New York, exemplifies this generational divide. He recalls funding his own medical education through “savings and working” with help from his in-laws—a scenario that would be impossible for today’s students facing dramatically higher costs.

**“This scholarship helps me in a tremendous way in terms of finances, but it also motivates me knowing that it was birthed from a career built on a foundation of work ethic and determination by Dr. Blau. I intend to continue to pursue this career with intention and generosity, just as it was exemplified by Dr. Blau.”**

—JACKSON BRIGHT '28



Jackson Bright '28 and Gianna DeRoberts '28



“Upstate Medical University, as it’s now called, set me on my career path, and I won’t forget it,” he says of he and wife Suzy’s financial support. “With the cost of medical education as it is today, every little bit helps,” he says.

## A Campaign Born from Board Vision

The Generation to Generation campaign emerged from discussions within the Medical Alumni Foundation’s Finance and Executive Committees around 2019, as board members recognized the growing financial burden facing students. Key alumni donors were approached to gauge support for a concentrated scholarship effort.

“Those early conversations with alumni and donors reinforced the understanding that student need was overwhelming and that we really should have a concentrated, focused effort to do something about it,” recalls Norcross.

The campaign officially launched in 2021 with a \$15 million goal, supported by early major gifts from alumni such as Zaven Ayanian, MD ’59, and Bruce Leslie, MD ’78, whose early commitment helped demonstrate the campaign’s viability to other potential donors. The Foundation’s existing scholarship program, which at the time administered 82 alumni-funded

scholarships providing more than \$500,000 annually, served as the foundation for expansion.

Dr. Leslie, who established the Stanley D. Leslie Memorial Scholarship in honor of his father, Stanley Leslie, MD ’51, personifies this sentiment.

“I had the option of attending Upstate, which cost \$1,500 a semester, or Tufts Medical School, which cost many times that. It was an easy decision,” Leslie recalls. “When I started my post-graduate education in Boston, it quickly became apparent that the education I received at Upstate was at least as good, if not better, than my Boston-educated peers. My class spent next to nothing for our Upstate

**“I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Patricia Blau for her incredibly generous contribution to my medical education. With the current cost of attendance and rising federal loan interest rates, her gift has fundamentally changed my ability to attend school this year.”**

—JONATHAN RISMAN Y ’27

## Campaign Leadership Committee

Zaven S. Ayanian, MD ’59  
 Patricia and Stephen P. Blau, MD ’68\*  
 Elliot Brandwein, MD ’67 and Arlene Brandwein, MD ’68\*  
 Richard W. and Joan Doust  
 Robert A. Dracker, MD ’82  
 Susan and Welton M. Gersony, MD ’58  
 Bruce M. Leslie, MD ’78  
 Laura and Norman Loomis, MD ’56  
 Nancy and David Lynch, MD ’75  
 Helen\* and Albert F. Mangan, MD ’54\*  
 Angeline R. Mastri, MD ’59\*  
 Patricia J. Numann, MD ’65  
 Allan J. Press, MD ’67  
 Michael H. Ratner, MD ’68  
 Charles J. Ryan, III MD ’82  
 Maureen L. Sheehan, MD ’88  
 Mrs. Barbara Sheperdigian and Ara A. Sheperdigian, MD ’60\*  
 Department of Surgery  
 Swift Family Legacy Grants  
 Suzy and Herbert M. Weinman, MD ’65  
 Frank E. Young, MD ’56\*  
 \* deceased

medical degree. We should be grateful for the many opportunities our degree provided.”

Maureen Sheehan, MD ’88, who established an endowed scholarship fund at age 56 targeting primary care students, decided to act during her lifetime rather than waiting for estate planning. “Some people wait until they die to do something like this, but I don’t want to have regrets or have someone else decide what to do with my money,” she says.

The Weinmans bring a personal approach to their giving, establishing criteria that reflect their values and professional focus. Their annual scholarship gift targets third-year students interested in family medicine, requiring essays about community service and career motivation. Over the course of the campaign, they have increased their annual scholarship gift from \$10,000 to \$25,000. “People were supportive of me when I went to medical school, and so I thought it’s time to return the favor,” says Weinman.

Mallory Stephens, MD ’54, a 96-year-old rheumatologist who practiced for 49 years, represents the campaign’s oldest generation of supporters. After completing his medical train-

ing in New York City and serving in the Army at Fort Detrick's Biological Warfare Center, Stephens established a career in private practice that spanned 36 years.

"I thought endowing a scholarship was a good way to help today's medical students," says Stephens. His perspective reflects the straightforward generosity of many alumni who view scholarship support as a natural extension of their gratitude to the institution.

Early on, the campaign's trajectory changed dramatically, when retired ophthalmologist Alan Norton, MD '66, reached out expressing interest in supporting his medical alma mater in a major way.

Dr. Norton served as a visiting faculty member at the Stein Eye Institute at UCLA for more than 20 years and also had his own ophthalmology practice and served as a consultant to three different hospitals in Los Angeles in his subspecialty of retinal diseases. Ultimately, he and his wife, Marlene, made a significant gift to name the Alan and Marlene Norton College of Medicine.

"I am grateful for the quality education that I received from the SUNY Upstate Medical University," Norton says. "This provided me the opportunity for a career in medical research and practice. Our estate gift to the Upstate College of Medicine is to demonstrate our appreciation and help the college to continue its excellence in teaching and innovation."

While the full naming gift wasn't counted toward the campaign total, the cash portion provided crucial momentum. "It gave us a jumpstart for where we were headed and was a wonderful testament to how we were going to reach our goal," Norcross explains.

And in a full-circle moment, Dr. and Mrs. Norton made a second generous gift that will close the campaign at more than \$25 million raised. Their second gift establishes the Alan and Marlene Norton Presidential Chair, given in honor of Upstate Medical University President Mantosh Dewan, MD, HS '79. The first Presidential Chair in SUNY history, it will provide the president with \$250,000 in discretionary funds annually for strategic priorities such as scholarships, faculty, and student research.



The Alan and Marlene Norton Presidential Chair, given in honor of Upstate Medical University President Mantosh Dewan, MD, HS '79, will provide the president with \$250,000 in discretionary funds annually. It is the first Presidential Chair in SUNY history.

## Life-Changing Impact

But the campaign's impact extends far beyond numbers, transforming individual lives and career trajectories.

As an Upstate medical student, Cholette Fiore, MD '25, was awarded the Elliot Brandwein, MD '67 and Arlene Eckstein Brandwein, MD '68 Scholarship as well as the Nathan and Ada August Memorial Scholarship. "In addition to providing financial support on this costly journey, being honored with these scholarships was a recognition of hard work and dedication and a reminder that we, as medical students, have a strong community and support system behind us," says Fiore, now beginning internal medicine residency at Boston University Medical Center. "As a recent graduate, I intend on being active in our alumni community and look forward to be in the position where I can pay it forward and join our gracious donors in supporting the next generation of doctors."

Maria Krisch, MD '24, benefited from four different scholarships during her third and fourth years of medical school. Now in her second year of ophthalmology residency at Upstate, she reflects on what those scholarships meant to her.

"Medical school is hard as is. You're constantly swamped by studying. You've got tons of clinical duties. You come home, you're exhausted. And, the added stress of growing debt is huge," she says. "The generosity of scholarship donors helps alleviate some of that stress to help you focus on your studies and on becoming a good clinician."



Krisch received the Joseph J. Gadbaw and Anne Gadbaw Scholarship, the Sonia LaBella Scholarship, the James McGraw Scholarship, and the Zaven Ayanian Scholarship. While she hasn't met her donors in person, she made contact through letters expressing her gratitude.

"I'm forever thankful to these donors and I'm committed to paying it forward myself," she says. "I think these scholarships speak volumes about the Upstate culture as a whole. We have really good students here. We have really good clinicians. But I think our best asset is the fantastic people committed to giving back."

Thomas Bedard, MD '21, began medical study at the Norton College of Medicine directly after college. "With very little financial means or savings, taking on more debt was daunting," he says. A good student, Bedard went on to receive support from the Upstate Medical Alumni Foundation with the Kasten Aker Family Scholarship, Swift Family Legacy Grant, N. Barry Berg Scholar-



Christian Poblano '27

## Stephen Blau '68 Memorial Scholarship Recipients

Eunice Baik '28

Jackson Bright '28

Gianna DeRoberts '28

Stephanie Ezeoke '28

Mack Ogden '28

Christian Poblano '27

Brianna Rheäume '27

Jonathan Rismany '28

Michelle Robbins '27

Khristy Tapiero '28

Kelly Zhou '27

ship for Musculoskeletal Medicine, and the Rick Zogby Memorial Scholarship.

"The scholarships helped pay for educational resources, housing, and other life expenses that otherwise would've been difficult to afford," says Bedard, now a fourth-year orthopedic surgery resident at Upstate. "I am forever grateful for the support that I received. In the future, I too will look to 'pay it forward,' remembering the humble roots from which I came."

The relief expressed by Blau scholarship recipients only amplifies the profound effect of donor generosity on students' lives.

"I feel a tremendous weight lifted off my shoulders," says Tapiero. "Just days earlier, I had been discussing my concerns about student debt with my mother, so learning that I had received this scholarship felt surreal. It was a powerful reminder that things sometimes fall into place when you least expect it."

For Christian Poblano '27, the scholarship's impact extends beyond his own education. "It sets me years ahead of my goal to help my parents retire and pay off their mortgage," he says. "A dollar amount can't directly be equated to the time we have in life, but this scholarship will hopefully help me take care of my family in a way I have dreamt of for years, much sooner."

"I am almost always thinking about how I am going to afford tuition and living expenses," adds Mack Ogden '28. "This scholarship gives me the peace of mind necessary to focus on my studies instead of my finances and I am so grateful for this luxury."



"As a first-generation medical student, this scholarship has an immeasurable impact. Not having to worry about tuition for the year lifts an enormous weight off my shoulders, both financially and emotionally," says Brianna Rheame '27.

## A Legacy of Generational Support

The Generation to Generation campaign was the Medical Alumni Foundation's first comprehensive fundraising campaign, setting a new standard for alumni engagement. Previous fundraising efforts, while successful, were more targeted, such as the Lloyd Rogers Chair in Surgery or individual scholarship endowments.

The campaign's success demonstrates that when alumni understand the challenges facing current students and see concrete ways to help, they respond with remarkable generosity. The more than \$25 million raised represents a collective commitment to ensuring that financial barriers don't prevent talented students from pursuing medical careers.

The Generation to Generation campaign has dramatically expanded the Foundation's scholarship capacity. The endowment has grown from \$22 million at the campaign's launch to \$37.6 million today, enabling the Foundation to award 178 scholarships totaling \$985,000 this fall—nearly double the amount at the start of the campaign—and that's not including the Blau scholarships.

"This will be a new record," Norcross notes, reflecting on the unprecedented level of support now available to students.

The timing couldn't be more appropriate. New legislation capping federal loans on professional

**"I am so thankful to Mrs. Blau for her generous support of me through this scholarship. Her generosity is going to make a world of a difference for me and my family. Thanks to her, I feel empowered to continue forward in my journey to becoming the first doctor in my family. I hope that I can honor the investment that she made in me by continuing to work hard to achieve my dreams so that I can lift as I climb, just as she has done for me."**

—KELLY ZHOU '27

education threatens the accessibility of medical school for students most at need and to exacerbate the growing physician shortage. Financial need at Upstate has reached unprecedented levels. The Medical Alumni Foundation received more than 2,800 scholarship applications for the 2025–26 academic year from students seeking support from the growing number of scholarship awards. "Sadly, student need still exceeds our ability to provide support," says Norcross. "There is more work to be done and we will continue looking to alumni and friends for support."

As the first cohort of Blau scholarship recipients begin a year of medical school without tuition worry, they represent the fulfillment of the Generation to Generation promise: that each generation of physicians will support the next, ensuring that the opportunity to serve others through medicine remains accessible to all who have the calling to heal.

"If I had the opportunity to speak with my benefactor, I would express my immense gratitude for helping students from backgrounds like mine pursue medical education with a lighter financial burden," says Tapiero. "As the first in my family to attend medical school, the journey has been both rewarding and challenging. Knowing that someone believes in us enough to invest in our future is incredibly motivating, and it inspires me to one day pay that generosity forward." ■