



MEDIA RELEASE

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Kent Resident Earns Scholarships, Statewide Award Highline College Student Honored As All-Washington Scholar

DES MOINES, Wash. — Vaishali Vakharia earned statewide recognition today for her accomplishments as a Highline College student. The Kent resident was honored as a member of the 2019 All-Washington Academic Team for her academic achievement.

Vakharia and other top scholars from the state's 34 community and technical colleges attended today's awards ceremony at South Puget Sound Community College in Olympia.

Each college could nominate up to four students for the award. To qualify, students must apply for recognition and be members of the [Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society](#).

By being named to the All-Washington team, Vakharia earned \$500 in scholarships: \$250 given by KeyBank and \$250 by the Highline College Foundation.

Vakharia, 29, has a 3.84 GPA.

She was the first in her family to go beyond 10th grade in her birthplace of India. She earned top marks through 12th grade, especially notable because instruction switched to English from Gujarati after 10th grade, and went on to earn a three-year bachelor's degree in India before getting married and moving to the U.S.

With a dream of becoming a CPA and a new 6-month-old son, Vakharia enrolled at Highline to finish prerequisites she would need to transfer to a bachelor's degree program at University of Washington Tacoma.

"My journey to the undergraduate transfer admissions for UW is a long tale full of many obstacles. I have worked through or around them though, not very different from how river water flows downstream despite obstacles along the way," she says.

Those obstacles — attending college while caring for her baby, continuing to learn English and “working through the huge cultural differences between America and India” — makes Vakharia’s achievements all the more remarkable.

She notes that she was the first in her family to attend college and graduate.

“It was a very proud moment for me as well as for my parents. But, being a girl child is also disadvantage because we need to marry as we come to certain age.”

A Hindu, Vakharia followed this cultural practice rather than continue her studies in India.

“I got married and came to United States. But I was lucky enough to have in-laws who are supporting me in achieving my dream.”

“We are very proud of our All-Washington scholar, Vaishali Vakharia,” says Dr. Mutallip Anwar, English instructor and Phi Theta Kappa adviser at Highline. “As an immigrant, first-generation college student, she faced tremendous challenges in continuing her education in a new country. But through persistence and intense effort, she not only overcame the obstacles and survived the rigors of academic life, but also thrived in her new environment. Students like her and their stories make working at Highline a truly rewarding experience.”

The [All-Washington Academic Team program](#) is sponsored by the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, Washington Association of Community and Technical Colleges, Washington State Association of College Trustees and Phi Theta Kappa.

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Attachments: Photo of Vaishali Vakharia

Links within this release:

— Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society: <http://www.ptk.org/default.aspx>

— All-Washington Academic Team program: <https://spscc.edu/allwa>

Founded in 1961 as the first community college in King County, Highline College annually serves more than 17,000 students. With over 70 percent students of color, Highline is the most diverse higher education institution in the state. The college offers a wide range of academic transfer, professional-technical education, basic skills and applied bachelor’s degree programs. Alumni include former Seattle Mayor Norm Rice, entrepreneur Junki Yoshida and former Washington state poet laureate Sam Green.