



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **Highline's All-Washington Academic Team Announced** Two Students Honored with State-Wide Recognition for Achievements

DES MOINES, Wash. — Dedication to community and helping others has earned two Highline College students a place on the [All-Washington Academic Team](#).

Grace Thykkuttathil and Maureen Ondatto have both received \$500 for their efforts, with \$250 given by KeyBank and \$250 by the Highline College Foundation.

The two students and other top scholars from the state's 34 community and technical colleges will be recognized during the April 25 [awards ceremony](#) at South Puget Sound Community College.

Each college can nominate up to four students. To qualify, students must apply for recognition and be members of [Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society](#), the international honor society of two-year colleges. [Pi Sigma](#) is Phi Theta Kappa's Highline chapter.

### **Grace Thykkuttathil**

Grace Thykkuttathil, a 17-year-old Federal Way resident, will be graduating with an associate degree this summer. They attend both high school and college through Highline's [Running Start program](#). Upon graduation, Thykkuttathil intends to transfer to the University of Washington to pursue a bachelor's degree in communications.

"I am deeply passionate about social justice and advancing the rights of the disenfranchised. As a BIPOC, Queer, neurodivergent youth, I have first-hand experience with the ways that minority groups are systemically harmed in our local community", they said.

With this in mind, during their sophomore year Thykkuttathil initiated a group at their school called the Gay-Straight Alliance. The aim of the group was to create a safe, supportive

space for other queer teens experiencing harmful language being directed at them.

Thykkuttathil's ultimate goal is to extend their impact by supporting diversity, equity and inclusion efforts in the community.

## Maureen Ondatto

Seatac resident, Maureen Ondatto, is studying full-time at Highline College to achieve an associate degree in pre-nursing. Ondatto's determination to succeed is fueled by her experience in coming to the US, from Africa, to pursue her education.

The 45-year-old sees systematic racism as being the most significant issue affecting her community. Its far-reaching impact needs a holistic approach, she says, with education being at the heart of the solution.

"We need to create an educational environment where open conversations about racial issues are encouraged, challenging biases and prejudices that persist," she declared.

Mental health is another area that Ondatto is interested in, demonstrated by her work within the TRiO program at Highline College. There, she initiated campaigns to grow awareness of mental health challenges for students who are low-income, undocumented or with disabilities. Ondatto says the group was able to reduce stigma and provide essential support.

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 Honor Society](#).

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### Links within this release:

- <https://www.highline.edu/all-washington-2024/>
- <https://spscc.edu/allwa>
- <https://www.ptk.org/>
- <https://ptk.highline.edu/>
- <https://www.sbctc.edu/>
- <https://www.sbctc.edu/colleges-staff/commissions-councils/wactc/>
- <https://www.sbctc.edu/about/college-trustees/>

*Founded in 1961 as the first community college in King County, Highline College annually serves 14,100 students. With over 75 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, Dr. Tom Jackson, president of Cal-Poly Humboldt and former Washington state poet laureate Sam Green.*