HIGHLIGHT PROMISING TALENTS: EXCELLENCE SCHOLARS AIM HIGH

This year, the ETH Excellence Scholarship & Opportunity Programme (ESOP) is able to support another 51 Master students, who stood out from over 540 applicants on account of their excellent performance. Half of this year’s excellence scholars hold a Bachelor degree from ETH Zurich. About one third of them are Swiss, the remaining scholars come to ETH’s renowned excellent teaching and research facilities from different parts of the world. In particular, ETH’s educational offering, including expanded interdisciplinary curricula, research and novel forms of teaching, are key attraction factors. Since its launch in 2007, 286 excellence scholars have benefitted from the stipend, the networking opportunities and exchanges with corporate, public and private partners. Much of the research conducted by ESOP scholars is promising: one out of 7 ESOP scholars (42 in total) received at least one award for scientific achievement or outstanding research. In addition, ESOP scholars were promoted to become PhD students, or won an ETH Pioneer Fellowship to explore opportunities to develop their research product for entry into the market.
Samuel (25), who was born in Costa Rica and raised in Kenya, Switzerland and New Zealand, became an ESOP scholar at the Department of Biology in 2010. As a doctoral student, he now studies the development and function of the pulmonary immune system. Just over halfway into his doctorate, he has already contributed significantly to publications in high-index scientific journals, most recently articles published in Nature Immunology and Science.

Bettina Heim

26-year-old Bettina was a Swiss champion in figure skating before she took up her studies at ETH Zurich. In 2014, she became an ESOP scholar at the Department of Physics. Already as an undergraduate, she succeeded in publishing the results of her semester project in Science, one of the most prestigious scientific journals. Bettina was able to show why current quantum computing devices were no faster in certain tests than conventional computers, contrary to previous assumptions.

The Excellence Scholarship was initially a great incentive to come to ETH Zurich for my Masters, as it would allow me to fully focus on my research. However, only once I had begun, I realized how lucky I was to be part of – and interact with – such an excellent group of young people. I am very grateful to all the donors for giving me this opportunity and I cannot emphasize enough how beneficial this has been for my research and my whole ETH experience.

The ESOP scholarship allows me to fully focus on physics during my Master studies. Retiring from my job as figure skating coach not only gives me time for my projects but also makes it possible to pursue my goals in the best research groups around the world. I get a good head start on the way to achieve my dream of conducting research.

Number of ESOP scholars by nationality

Since its launch in 2007, 286 excellence scholars have been supported by ESOP. About one third are Swiss (86 in total).
HIGHLIGHT ETH ALUMNI SUPPORT ESOP
This year, a record number of 1400 alumni and friends of ETH Zurich support the Excellence Scholarship Programme. This number is in addition to another 1100 that are committed to donate to ESOP since the programme was launched eight years ago. An astonishing detail: the youngest donor is 23 years old and holds a Master’s degree in Physics, the oldest ages 96, and completed his studies in electrical engineering half a century ago. The Zurich branch of the ETH alumni association had the opportunity to meet some of the scholars in person on 12 November 2014 — and got carried away by their enthusiasm, drive and high potential.

It is absolutely fantastic to see the increasing bonding of the alumni with ETH Zurich and the large interest in supporting young talents!

Walter Gränicher, President ETH Alumni Association

HIGHLIGHT NEW RECTOR HEADING ESOP
Sarah Springman, Professor for Geotechnical Engineering, is the new Rector as of January 2015 and, in this function is responsible for ensuring educational excellence of the technical university. She heads the Excellence Scholarship and Opportunity Programme. The British national studied Engineering Sciences at the University of Cambridge, UK, and became professor at ETH Zurich in 1997, where she has focused her research on geotechnical problems relating to soil-structure-interaction and natural hazards.

As a research-oriented institution possessing rich scientific history and reputation, ETH Zurich offers an environment that is both supportive and intellectually stimulating. During my Master studies, I had the unique opportunity to experience the reality of cutting edge research and interact with some of the leading experts in my field of research.

The ESOP scholarship is a great opportunity to meet people from all parts of ETH Zurich, in particular the students but also the donors. I really enjoy the multidisciplinary discussions that always start at any ESOP event. The scholarship also gave me the financial flexibility to focus completely on my studies and my volunteer work for the informatics olympiad during the last three semesters.

“My task as Rector is to provide all promising talent — men and women alike — with a good start to their academic careers.”

Professor Sarah Springman, ETH Rector

PORTRAIT DENITSA BAYKUSHEVA
Denitsa (25) obtained her entire academic education at ETH Zurich, where she became an ESOP scholar at the Department of Chemistry and Applied Biosciences in 2012. Her research was award winning: in 2013 she received the Willi-Studer Prize honouring her achievements as best student within the faculty cohort at the Masters level; and in 2014 the ETH Medal for an outstanding Master thesis. This year, as a doctoral student, she was invited to the 65th Lindau Nobel Laureate Meeting, which expects a record number of 67 laureates and more than 650 young scientists.

PORTRAIT DANIEL GRAF
Daniel (24) received the ESOP scholarship in 2013 from ETH Zurich, where he is currently finishing his Masters degree at the Department of Computer Science. Daniel is passionate about algorithms and in particular, theoretical computer science and graphics: he developed some smart applications and won a series of medals and prizes at international informatics contests. He participated in the recent G200 Youth Forum as an ETH student delegate and, as President of the Swiss Olympiad in Informatics, spoke about how to foster talents in computer science.

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SCHOLARS GAIN INDUSTRY INSIGHTS

In autumn 2014, 37 ESOP scholars visited RMS Foundation, a service laboratory and research institute. The Bettlach-based non-profit organisation offers testing, advisory services, training as well as technology transfer. The students were shown the testing facilities and labs and learned about bio-inspired scaffolds and other materials that are analysed and mechanically tested, or about challenges related to a lack of cleanliness with implants that cause infections. A month later, ESOP scholars had another opportunity to get in close contact with one of the partners of the programme: Open Systems, an international provider of enterprise security services for networks and applications. Some 60 scholars enjoyed the open dialogues and networking apéro on the rooftop – also for Open Systems a welcoming opportunity to scan the talent pool for future employees.

DONORS ENGAGE IN DIALOGUES WITH ESOP SCHOLARS

On 28 April 2015, some 150 people followed the invitation of ETH Rector Sarah Springman to the annual ‘Meet the Talent’ event. Donors and partners that support the Excellence Scholarship Programme engaged in inspiring dialogues with over 50 ESOP scholars who presented their research on Masters level, including innovative products that have some relevance for society, yet market entry is a long way ahead.

3-MINUTE PITCH FOR A THERAPY THAT COMBATS HOSPITAL PATHOGEN

Mattias Ivarsson, ESOP scholar from 2008 who completed his studies at ETH Zurich with a PhD in Biomedical Engineering, was granted a Pioneer Fellowship of ETH Zurich last year to prepare market entry for his new therapy against infections caused by the hospital pathogen Clostridium difficile. In September 2014, Mattias pitched his business idea to a jury at the Falling Walls Lab Zurich. The Swede won the competition and travelled to Berlin to the international Falling Walls Lab Festival to compete against the 99 finalists from around the world.