

A smart investment



Clark College student Cindy Nguyen hopes to become an ultrasound technician.

“I’ve always wanted to go to college,” says Clark student Cindy Nguyen. Even so—and despite her excellent grades—Nguyen acknowledges that college has its challenges.

“When you come to college, you need to learn to study more efficiently than you did in high school,” says the 19-year-old. “And there’s the money thing: tuition, and then textbooks are really expensive, like \$200 a quarter.”

Like almost three-quarters of Clark’s student body, Nguyen is a first-generation college student. Her mother, a nail technician, and her father, who installs hardwood flooring, never had the chance to attend college in their native Vietnam. Paying for college for their children (Nguyen’s older sister, who also attended Clark, is now a social worker, and her younger sister is still in middle school) is a financial challenge for them—but one they have decided is worth the sacrifice.

“They’re really supportive,” says Nguyen. “They’re willing to do anything for me to pursue my education, because they never had that opportunity.”

Being able to attend Clark has helped significantly in reducing the cost of college for the Nguyen family, who have lived in Vancouver since the 1990s. Nguyen is able to save on housing by staying with her parents while completing her prerequisites at Clark before transferring to a farther-away institution to complete her degree in ultrasound technology. Furthermore, she has received support from scholarships made possible by generous donors to the Clark College Foundation.

“That’s been really helpful,” she says. “It’s relieved the financial burden. Without the scholarships, I would have to get a job to support myself in college. This way, I can just concentrate on my studies. I’m so focused on what I’m doing.”

Every year, Clark College Foundation supports the college’s students with tens of thousands of dollars in scholarships, many of which are funded by Clark alumni who remember being struggling students themselves.

Nguyen says having total strangers investing in her education gives her a sense of responsibility to make that investment worthwhile. “It’s really motivating,” she says. “Their way of helping me has allowed me to enable myself, achieve an education, and hopefully support other people one day. I see myself working at a hospital and helping people as an ultrasound technician. That’s my dream. So what I’m learning right now, I’m going to give back to them—and I’m going to help support my parents, too.”

Photo: Clark College/Jenny Shadley