The Golden Opportunity Scholars Institute (GO) is a program of ASA, CSSA, and SSSA. Funded by the Agronomic Science Foundation, the Institute’s Golden Opportunity Scholarship is uniquely designed with the aspirations of undergraduate students and rising professionals in mind.

Using an integrated approach, the program combines mentorship with fully funded opportunities to attend Societies’ International Annual Meeting. Collectively, the program allows students to undergo formative experiences instrumental for shaping their future career in the fields of agronomy, crop science, and soil science.

“The Golden Opportunity Scholars Program is unique in the fact that it is both a travel scholarship and a mentored experience,” explains Eric Welsh, Program Manager of Marketing and Business Relations for ASA, CSSA, and SSSA. Upon being paired with a mentor who is highly skilled in the scholar’s area of study, students engage in monthly conversations with their mentor for one year. Rachel Leege, Science Communications Manager for ASA, CSSA, and SSSA, says that the guidance cultivated through the relationship transcends the time of the program. “Many times the relationship continues beyond the year of the scholarship and transforms into a lifelong professional connection,” she says.

Leege believes that the network formed through the GO program, comprised of mentors, professionals, and students, is valuable for students as they look to seek an advanced education and further refine their career path. “Seeking a career or graduate school program is much easier when students have the guidance of those who have gone down that path before them,” Leege says. “Mentors can share their life experiences and wisdom to give advice.”

Greta Rockstad, a 2018 GO Scholar and undergraduate at the University of Minnesota, credits the program with its ability to allow her to form a valuable network comprised of students and professionals. This summer, Rockstad will begin to pursue graduate study in crop science at North Carolina State University and aspires to establish a career in plant breeding.

“My mentor was and still is a valuable resource for guiding me through the graduate school application process,” Rockstad acknowledges. “She provided me with a rational approach to choosing a school and adviser, and I don’t think I would be as satisfied with my choice of school if it wasn’t for her mentorship.”

For 2018 GO Scholar Matthew Runyon, the mentorship and professional network he has acquired from the program has helped him navigate through the various opportunities in crop science careers and graduate programs.

“As some of the leading young minds in the field of crop science, my peers in the GO Scholarship program are individuals who I will likely interact closely with during my future career,” Runyon says. “I
Consider making a donation to the Golden Opportunity Fund. Visit a-s-f.org/donate or call Eric Welsh at 608-273-8081.

“I am glad to have such a close network of quality people that I can rely on.”

Currently serving as an undergraduate research assistant with the Department of Crop Sciences at the University of Illinois, Runyon is studying solutions for how to improve production of corn and other crop species. After graduating this spring, he will begin a soybean breeding co-op with Corteva Agriscience while working to pursue graduate study through a chosen program.

In addition to attending the ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Annual Meeting, select GO Scholars are also afforded the opportunity to experience the Societies’ Congressional Visits Day in Washington, DC. Scholars undergo a day of advocacy training with graduate students, professional Society members, and Certified Crop Advisers prior to meeting with legislators on Capitol Hill.

After being developed in 2005 as part of CSSA’s 50th anniversary, the inaugural GO Scholar class stood at 15 students. Over a 13-year period, the class has grown quite a bit with a total of 245 recipients as of last year. Scholars are selected based on their academic success along with their expressed interest in agronomy, crop science, and soil science.

Welsh encourages prospective donors to support the GO program for its ability to build the skills and competency necessary for supporting the agronomic sciences.

“Donors should want to support the fund because the program encourages talented students to study agronomy, crop science, and soil science while cultivating networks, within our membership and their chosen industry, to develop the necessary workforce to sustain the profession,” he says.

You can donate securely online at a-s-f.org/donate, or make your check payable to ASF, 5585 Guilford Rd. Madison, WI 53711-5801, with “Golden Opportunity Fund” on the memo line. Contact Eric Welsh, 608-273-8081, for more information.

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