

Wednesday, February 15th, 2017

Dear Macaulay Student Body,

On February 7th, Dean Pearl sent out an email to the Classes of 2019 and 2020 about changes to the Opportunities Fund. It highlighted a new policy that would restrict access to the fund for both classes until the Fall of 2018 access period—news that was met with shock, confusion, and disappointment. This was not the first communication by Macaulay on this subject that was ill-received by the student body. To address these ongoing changes, members of the Executive Board of the Macaulay Scholars Council (MSC) set up a meeting with administration to understand what events led up to this decision, and why the Opportunities Fund is no longer able to fulfill all requests. We met with:

- [Mary Pearl](#), *Dean*
- [Joseph Ugoretz](#), *Chief Academic Officer*
- [Veronica Maldonado](#), *Director of Scholarships and Grants*
- [Sheila Stainback](#), *Media Relations Manager*
- [Sasha De Silva](#), *Scholarship Coordinator*

On Friday, February 10th, we convened at the Macaulay building hoping to address and resolve the collective concerns of students. To do so, we needed to take a look at the changing financial and political landscapes that Macaulay and CUNY as a whole are facing. The purpose of this statement is to clearly convey the information the Executive Board learned at this meeting and to outline the steps the Macaulay Scholars Council and Macaulay administration will be taking to resolve these issues.

How did we get here?

Since the Opportunities Fund was established, it has been maintained by privately fundraised donations. In recent access periods, however, Macaulay has not been able to raise the full amount needed to cover all of the student requests. Up until two years ago, CUNY Central covered the remaining requests, but because of changes to its approach, a growing Macaulay student population, and a change in government funding, CUNY Central is **no longer absorbing the additional costs**.

In response, Macaulay changed the language of its Opportunities Fund policy to guarantee “up to \$7,500” and worked to increase fundraising efforts, as well as create a plan for the interim years which included creating a “priority list.” Due to a communication lag, this did not properly translate to all campuses (which explains why some students from the Class of 2019 received acceptance letters from their respective home campuses that still advertised the full amount). With the end of CUNY support and resulting introduction of the priority list, the Classes of 2017 and 2018 (the last classes that were correctly advertised the “full \$7,500”) felt that they were

being cheated out of the promise. Accordingly, Dean Pearl made an agreement with CUNY Central to loan Macaulay enough money to cover the cost of the Fund for those classes. In theory, if any money was leftover, the money would cover the following classes. However, because the chances of having leftover funds are incredibly slim, the administration made the decision not to consider applications from the Classes of 2019 and 2020 until the Fall 2018 access period. The administration did not want students from the Classes of 2019 and 2020 to waste their time with applications that would ultimately be rejected.

Following this decision, the administration considered different ways of disseminating this information, and decided to send out an email. Originally, the plan was to notify students during winter break of 2017, but it was believed that the email would go unnoticed during that time period. This is what led the Macaulay Marketing team to send out the email blast on February 7th.

How does the Opportunities Fund budget fit within Macaulay?

The Opportunities Fund is made up of private donations specifically allocated to the Fund. Student Activities (i.e. club budgets, Spring Formal, Scholars Council initiatives and retreats) are also privately-funded and sometimes student-funded, but are an entirely separate budget . Amenities such as the vending machines come at no cost to Macaulay, and all profits will go back to the student activities budget. Student Health & Wellness services, including the appointment of Dr. Korn as our new head psychologist, are supported by external grants that can only be used towards initiatives in this realm. The proposal to design a mascot is free, student-run, and involves college personnel separate from those making Opportunities Fund decisions. Other budgets that cannot be reallocated include seminars and related functions (i.e. Night at the Museum, BioBlitz). Because of these particularities, money from any of these budgets **cannot legally be reallocated into the Opportunities Fund budget pool**. In the case that we could take money from other budgets, there still would not exist a sufficient pool of money to fund study abroad trips.

How will things work now?

Class Year	Current Situation
2017	<p>Guaranteed access for Spring 2017 access period for approved requests for Spring and Summer 2017 activities, without adherence to the priority list.</p> <p>If studying abroad in Summer 2017, must apply for extended graduation and credits will not be waived (but can be covered with Opportunities Funds).</p>

2018	<p>Guaranteed access for Fall 2017 and Spring 2018 access periods for approved requests for advances and reimbursements, without adherence to the priority list. This includes reimbursements for expenses from Summer 2017, according to Opp Fund guidelines.</p> <p>If funds remain after the Class of 2017 applications are fulfilled (Spring 2017 access period), Class of 2018 applications will be considered.</p>
2019	<p>Priority list reinstated Fall 2018 access period. Any opportunities prior to this access period <i>may</i> be reimbursed (as per guidelines), but there is no guarantee. Specific Macaulay-run study abroad programs are no longer guaranteed to receive Opportunities Funds, because they are no longer supported by the original one-time external grants.</p> <p>Keeping this in mind, filing reimbursement applications for the Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall of 2018 access periods will be allowed.</p>
2020	<p>Priority list reinstated Fall of 2018 access period. Any opportunities prior to this access period may be reimbursed (as per guidelines), but there is no guarantee. Specific Macaulay-run study abroad programs are no longer guaranteed to receive Opportunities Funds, because they are no longer supported by the original one-time external grants.</p>

For any students with special cases (i.e. those graduating early or in rigorous programs), you are encouraged to contact [Joseph Ugoretz](#) or [Veronica Maldonado](#) to discuss your circumstances.

How do we move forward?

Firstly, the Opportunities Fund policy wording will be updated across all platforms, and a dollar amount will be removed entirely. Honors advisors and campus admissions personnel will also be informed of recommended language to use when discussing the Opportunities Fund with current and incoming students. Macaulay has also brought on a new VP of External Affairs who will work closely with Dean Pearl to fundraise.

Here are the changes the Scholars Council advocated for and that the administration is actively considering:

- An extensive online database of scholarships to be included on the newly designed Macaulay website
- Email blasts regarding study abroad opportunities
- Fundraising events like a gala for donors to showcase Macaulay talent

The administration has also considered rethinking the way Opportunities Funds are granted. For example, one alternative is evaluating Fund requests based solely on statements; another is pairing students and donors who have similar interests, which would help distribute the funds more efficiently.

Most importantly, the Scholars Council—and you, the students—will **be a part of the conversation**. The first step toward this goal will be to hold town halls at each campus with Dean Pearl and Macaulay administrators. These town halls will give students the opportunity to ask questions specific to their courses of study and campuses, to further clarify the financial circumstances, and to voice any other suggestions or concerns. Above all, town halls will bridge the gap between home campuses and Macaulay Central.

The Council made it clear to the administration that communication and transparency with students need to be improved, and they have agreed to consult with us in future discussions, *prior* to large decisions—not after the fact. The administration was very receptive to hearing our input based on your feedback from social media. We would like to thank you all for submitting your questions and voicing your concerns. This is an ongoing issue that can only be solved if we continue to work together.

The Scholars Council promises to continue advocating on your behalf and keep you informed.

Sincerely,

[Macaulay Scholars Council](#) Executive Board



Mitasha S. Palha '18
(President)



Madhav Bhatt '19
(VP of Campus Affairs)



Maisha Kamal '19

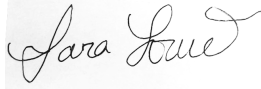
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