## Scholarship essays

Example

I intimately understand that for far too long, underrepresented groups, especially Pacific Islanders (PI), have been conditioned to believe our only connection with the law is the criminal justice system. It is not surprising to accept this truism when it is our bodies that are disproportionately criminalized and as a result overly represented in the prison population. At a time in which immigrants are hotly political and contested, I am an achiever because I was raised by immigrants from Samoa and Tonga.

When I started law school, I noticed there were no student organizations that supported or advocated on behalf of PI students and as a response, I founded the first- ever Pacific Islander Legal Association. Within three months of our formation, I organized the first-ever [Pre-Law Symposium for Pacific Islanders](https://www.kitv.com/story/39273909/uh-manoa-hosts-first-pre-law-symposium-to-boost-pacific-islander-enrollment). The goal of the two-day symposium was to demystify the application process and empower PIs to see they have a space in the field of law. The symposium included two keynote speakers — a Samoan First Deputy Prosecuting Attorney and the first Samoan judge in the United States — a panel of PI law students, a panel of PI legal professionals, a resume and personal statement writing workshop, a practice LSAT exam, a campus tour, and an admissions and financial aid informational session. What started as an endeavor with the hope of attracting 15 participants, ballooned into a movement with 77 attendees that hailed from a swath of island nations including New Zealand, Marshall Islands, Tonga, Fiji, Pohnpei, Samoa, Guam, and Hawaii.

My advocacy for my community then found its way to the state legislature. As the President of the Lambda Law Student Association, I pushed for a new bill that would create a third gender option for driver’s licenses. I organized student participation, set up lobby days at the state Capitol, and testified in front of and held meetings with various state politicians which eventually [led to the passing of the law](https://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/ny-hawaii-gender-x-option-signed-law-david-ige-20190626-dlmugvdk2vb2bgpyr4rjja7aya-story.html). My advocacy was rooted in cultural values and particularly in recognizing that Polynesians have always acknowledged the beauty and power of genders beyond the binary and Hawai‘i, in particular, is the number one state in terms of the highest percentage of the population that identifies as transgender.

Because of my work with the legislature and in law school, I was able to intern with the American Civil Liberties Union in New York City advocating for [LGBT rights](https://www.civilbeat.org/2019/10/why-marching-for-pride-is-still-so-necessary/) and published an article in the Hawai‘i Bar Journal on the importance of cultural competence in working and interacting with transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals. I have one goal as a gay Pacific Islander — to utilize the law as a tool for empowerment instead of oppression. If our peoples were able to traverse the largest ocean in the world and connect the smallest land masses, then why can’t we as Pacific Islanders now be that bridge that utilizes the language of law in order to uplift our communities?