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### **Five GSU Students Awarded Scholarship for Frontline Service**

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# Five GSU Students Awarded Scholarship for Frontline Service



Five [Governors State University](#) (GSU) students from the [College of Health and Human Services](#) were recently reminded that no good deed goes unnoticed! The students were awarded the Spirit of Service and [Global Service Learning](#) Scholarship for undergraduate and graduate students who are serving as frontline or essential workers during the COVID-19 crisis, while also doing community service.

Nadia Barrera, Peter Brassea, Megan Frick, Ahmad Hamdan, and Amara Jones and each received \$1,000 toward their educational pursuits after submitting videos of themselves explaining their activities helping the community, along with accompanying essays.

“Students wrote essays about how, during this COVID-19 crisis, they were still finding ways to serve in the community,” explained Nicole Koonce, an Associate Professor in GSU’s Department of [Communication Disorders](#) who served on the scholarship committee.

“We had really wonderful applications,” said Dr. Koonce, impressed with the philanthropic student body at Governors State.

The awards were presented during a virtual ceremony by Koonce, Amy Soub, Assistant Director of GSU's Office of [International Services](#); and Phyllis West, Senior Lecturer in GSU's [Department of Social Work](#).



**Nadia Berrera** is a [Physical Therapy](#) student, and her clinical internship involves serving at an outpatient clinic where she treats patients with a variety of needs. Berrera enjoys connecting with patients, while offering compassionate care with humility.

“I truly believe that if we can all come together as a community in this country, we can move mountains and restore health and humanity,” Berrera said in her essay.

In addition, Berrera was recognized for her work through a fellowship award in which she created and implemented a virtual afterschool program at the Back of the Yards College Prep high school on Chicago's southwest side.

Berrera said she wants to encourage young people of diverse backgrounds to consider careers in healthcare, ultimately increasing cultural and socioeconomic diversity in healthcare fields.

Wearing a facemask, a tearful Berrera accepted her award while on video at GSU.



**Peter Brassea** is working toward a [Master of Social Work](#) degree, after earning his bachelor's degree in May 2020.

Brassea is a frontline worker, serving as a cashier at a local grocery store, where he has worked for eight years. In accepting his award, Brassea said he has been surprised at the response he received from grateful customers. Military veterans have even thanked him for his service, he said.

“I try to instill hope in my customers by speaking from my heart and letting them know that I care deeply about them, because I do,” Brassea said in his essay. “I will continue impacting my community and protecting my loved ones to make the world a better place even during this time of heavy grief and social isolation.”

Brassea grocery shops for his elderly family members to reduce their risk of exposure. He's also a regular fixture in his neighborhood where he is known to pick up litter.



**Megan Frick** is studying for a degree in [Social Work](#).

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Frick had to leave her on-campus housing to move home and help take care of her five younger siblings who started e-learning.

As part of a service-learning project, Frick recently raised money for Meals on Wheels Fund, supporting the delivery of more than 100 meals to elderly community members affected by COVID-19 restrictions.

“I’ve been trying to do little things because even though they seem small to you, they can mean the world to someone else,” Frick said when accepting her award.

For the past three years Frick has served as a peer mentor at GSU’s [Center for Junior Year](#) and most recently has found herself providing mentees with emotional support, in addition to helping with finding access to financial resources during the pandemic.



**Amara**

**Jones**, a [Communication Disorders](#) major, spent the first part of the pandemic lockdown working as a nanny, caring for the children of a doctor who treats COVID-19 patients.

As the children transitioned into e-learning, Jones became responsible for their care 12 hours per day.

In Fall 2020, Jones returned to a full-time schedule at GSU, and reduced her work schedule by taking a part-time job caring for a woman with multiple sclerosis who uses a wheelchair.

“I’m an essential worker because if I don’t show up, a person will not be able to eat, get dressed, get clean, and enjoy the basic necessities of life,” Jones said.

While accepting her award, Jones said she is wondering what else she can do to help right now.

“I was listening to the other stories and it just inspires me to do more,” Jones said.



**Ahmad Hamdan** is pursuing a degree in [Occupational Therapy](#).

Hamdan had only been working as a medical courier for one month when the COVID-19 pandemic began to spread. While others could work from home, he had to visit local hospitals as part of his essential work.

“My job entailed traveling to nearby blood banks and collecting the exact amount of blood needed for emergency surgeries, regular surgeries and ill patients,” Hamdan said in his essay.

“I was constantly reminded that I had to reach my destination as quick as possible because someone’s life was on the line.”

While accepting his award, Hamdan talked about how devotion to his family and faith have kept his spirits up during the pandemic.

“Although the world is suffering, the only thing that’s going to heal it is us people, united,” Hamdan said.

The following students earned honorable mentions for the award:

Elijah Aguilar, Tiffany Burnham, Deborah Clair, Victoria Dean, Rakesh Enumula, Pamela Fullerton, Alicja Lichaj, Milica Maras, Anusha Putty, Lauren Richards, Shivani Sharma, Chasatte Simeon, Ayanna Thompson, Neha Upasana and Cristal Williams.

Congratulations to all!

