

Jimmy Chong Scholarship Selection Committee,

It is my pleasure to recommend Keelan Wilson for the Jimmy Chong Scholarship. My name is Dr. Devin Walker, and I serve as the Dean of Student Equity and Success at Cabrillo College. I taught and mentored Keelan during my time as Director of Global Leadership and Social Impact at The University of Texas at Austin. From our earliest interactions, he distinguished himself as a student who pursued learning with intention, welcomed challenge, and consistently exceeded the expectations of every experience he entered.

Despite being a first-generation student, Keelan possessed uncommon ambition, leading him to study abroad every year, despite the fact that less than 3% of students study abroad during their first year. He sought to expand his worldview, build a skillset that would allow him to be an effective leader in the 21st-century global workforce, and ensure that he was maximizing the resources available to him. Keelan entered the institution with a vision for himself that he actualized—not only setting himself up for success but positively influencing other Black male students to pursue global opportunities.

During a four-week summer study abroad program in Beijing, China, Keelan demonstrated strong analytical skills, an ability to thrive in ambiguity, and powerful intercultural competence despite not speaking Mandarin. In class, he consistently guided discussions toward questions of equity and community empowerment on a global scale. He absorbed complex concepts quickly and made meaningful connections between entrepreneurship in Beijing and communities like Houston, where he is from. It was clear to me that he approached learning not as an academic exercise but as preparation for meaningful impact he would one day deliver through leadership and service.

The following summer, Keelan traveled to Cape Town, South Africa, where his leadership and adaptability reached a new level. As part of our program on urban economic development, he interned with a local business in one of the largest Black townships in the world. I watched him integrate sociological insight, entrepreneurial thinking, and cultural empathy into practical solutions developed in partnership with the community he served. He left the township with a sharper understanding of economic inequality and a deepened commitment to structural change.

In Costa Rica, he further expanded his skill set by immersing himself in a Spanish-speaking environment for an entire semester. He reached conversational fluency and used it to build meaningful relationships and access perspectives unavailable without language competence. This experience strengthened his desire to use cross-cultural understanding as a tool for expanding opportunity and access.

The lessons he gained abroad shaped his work when he returned home to Houston. He founded Aknew Approach Inc., a nonprofit dedicated to supporting and empowering system-impacted young people through exposure to diverse opportunities and global travel.

Through its fellowship program, he curates intentionally designed “vision trips” that take youth beyond the boundaries of their neighborhoods—locally, nationally, and globally—so they can see, believe, and become more than their circumstances suggest. His mission is as profound as it is personal: to use exposure, education, and travel as instruments of hope, healing, and transformation. This work reflects his rare ability to convert insight into action and personal growth into community empowerment.

Keelan is a global leader with a local heart who has the unique ability to build community across race, background, and identity. Whether mentoring peers in the Heman Sweatt Center for Black Males, representing UT as a Global Fellow, or guiding youth through his nonprofit, he leads with both intellect and empathy. His peers respected him deeply and often sought his guidance because he approaches people with honesty, humility, and respect.

As an educator who has worked with students across continents, I can say with full confidence that Keelan is among the most exceptional I have encountered. His blend of intellectual rigor, emotional intelligence, and visionary purpose is rare. He approaches every obstacle as an opportunity to innovate, every community as a classroom, and every challenge as a call to action. Legal education will provide him with the formal tools to amplify what he already does instinctively—use knowledge, advocacy, and the law as instruments for meaningful social impact.

Keelan Wilson embodies the values of the Jimmy Chong Scholarship. He has demonstrated a sustained commitment to advocating for and supporting underrepresented communities, as well as the capacity to learn from complex environments and convert that learning into measurable community impact. I offer him my strongest recommendation and full confidence that he will use the power of law to advance equity, expand opportunity, and make a lasting and positive difference in the world.

Sincerely,

Dr. Devin Walker

Dean, Student Equity and Success

Cabrillo College

Former Director, Global Leadership and Social Impact

The University of Texas at Austin