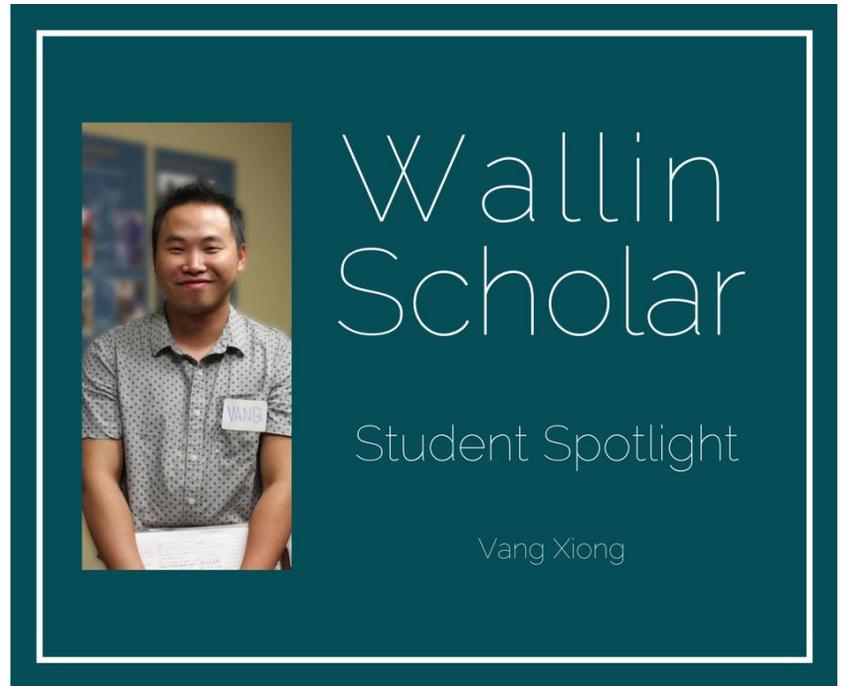


I was born and grew up in a refugee camp in Thailand. My family and I immigrated to the United States when I was ten years old. As the youngest of nine siblings, my sisters have had a significant and influential impact on my life. I remember a conversation with one of my sisters; she told me to study hard when I have the chance. When my sister was growing up it was not typical in my culture for females to go to school and my parents could not afford to pay for her school. My sister never received the education she wanted and now it is difficult for her to find a job. She encouraged me to study hard so I don't follow in her footsteps. My sisters and my parents are the reasons I always wanted to continue my education.



During my freshman year of high school, I enrolled in a program called TRIO Upward Bound at the University of Minnesota. I stayed enrolled throughout high school. In my senior year, the TRIO program provided me a list of scholarship opportunities and encouraged students to apply to as many as possible. Wallin Education Partners was on that list.

Upon my acceptance into the Wallin Education Partners program, I felt grateful and full of joy. As the first in my family to attend a four-year private college, I was grateful I didn't have to take out loans and most of all, I didn't have to ask my parents for help to pay for any additional expenses (room and board, transportation, parking, etc).

I am currently a senior and working on my Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering at the University of St. Thomas. In the past two years, I did Peace Engineering research with a professor and other students. In this research, I was involved in an innovation ideation where students applied their engineering skills to help people in developing countries. I presented the solution at an International Conference in the Caribbean Islands. I currently work part-time at a nonprofit organization called Compatible Technology International, where the company develops equipment for small farmers in developing countries.

No matter the circumstances, I would not have let cost prevent me from pursuing my education. I believe that with education, I will be more successful in the future. In addition to the financial support provided by the Wallin Education Partners program, being a Scholar makes me feel like I'm not alone. I always have someone looking after me when I'm feeling down. The Wallin Advisors are always there to help me resolve a problem (big or small) and they have connected me with other Scholars and faculty members on campus, as well as local industry leaders. Wallin Education Partners is not just a scholarship; it's more like a community, a family, who look out for each other.

~Vang Xiong, 2012 Eric Scholar