As colleges across the country raise tuition to support larger operating budgets, students increasingly rely on scholarships and grants to fund their education. The difference between scholarships and grants is minor, and to students, they are essentially the same: money for college that does not need to be repaid. To remain competitive and attract the very best students, Carleton needs to be able to offer these types of aid as part of an overall financial aid package.

Carleton believes strongly in providing need-based aid, not merit-based aid, because we believe all our students are merit students. Furthermore, this practice is rooted in the College’s liberal arts identity. We value exposing students to varying backgrounds and viewpoints, and we believe we should not limit the student body to one demographic or mindset. For this reason, it is crucial the College position itself to help students from all economic classes.

Learning happens as much through peers as it does through instructors, which is why Carleton is determined to cultivate a socio-diverse campus. Students like Sebastian Mugazambi from Zimbabwe, Grace Sassana from Chicago, Kifaya Taha from St. Paul, and Issa Wilson from Ranchos de Taos, New Mexico, all benefit the Carleton community with their unique perspectives. None of these students, however, would be at Carleton were it not for their scholarships.

In fall 2014, 55.3 percent of all Carleton students were awarded need-based financial aid, and Carleton prides itself on meeting 100 percent of all students’ demonstrated financial need for four years. To do that, the College relies heavily on generous donors and was able to award $34 million last year in scholarships and grants.

What does it mean to meet 100 percent of demonstrated need? When applying to college, students complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (the FAFSA) and the College Board Profile to determine their expected family contribution—the amount a family can reasonably be expected to contribute to a college education. This is subtracted from Carleton’s estimated total cost. For example, if the FAFSA determines a family can be expected to contribute about $22,000, that figure minus Carleton’s total estimated cost of $62,440 equals $40,425 worth of financial need. Through a combination of scholarships and grants, loans, and student employment, Carleton would offer that student a financial aid package worth $40,425.

Carleton’s extraordinary commitment means our students graduate with lower debt than national averages. Our scholarships and the supporters who fund them are essential to ensure that Carleton continues to enroll exceptional students, regardless of economic status.
Carleton might not realize it, Sabastian Mugazambi ’17 says, but the scholarship it awarded him has changed the future of his entire family.

As the son of a dressmaker and bus driver in Harare, Zimbabwe, Sabastian’s options for the future were limited. “People in developing countries, especially in Zimbabwe, are groomed to think one way,” he says.

But Sabastian is competitive, and when he heard only one or two students in all of Africa are accepted at Carleton, he knew he had to try. So he dreamed big and worked hard; coming here, he says, was the best decision of his life.

Thanks to his scholarship, Sabastian found a love of computer science and realized he wants to use his passion and skill for social entrepreneurship in Africa. “I realized since coming here how technology can change lives,” he said.

With another Carl also here on scholarship, Sabastian created a business plan for an online commerce platform—what Amazon is to the United States and Alibaba is to China, Sabastian’s brainchild will be to Africa.

“When I came here, everyone wanted a dress my mother made,” he said. “And I started thinking there should be a way for Africans living in the U.S. to buy things from back home and for Africans to be able to sell their goods worldwide, to grow as businesspeople.”

With help from the strong network of Carleton alumni, Sabastian and his partner are pitching their business plan to investors nationwide. He dreams so big, it scares him sometimes, Sabastian says—but it is all possible, thanks to his education and scholarship.

“If it weren’t for that scholarship, everything would be different,” he says. “It will be a chain reaction, changing the course of my future, my siblings’ futures, my parents’ futures—I will be able to support all of them with the way the Zimbabwe family structure works. It will move us from poverty to the middle class.”

Perhaps more importantly, it’s not just their financial situation that will change. Sabastian’s experience will change his peers’ way of thinking. “We have always had a gap between what was possible and impossible,” he said. “But I was able to bridge that gap, and now the whole community sees that it can be done. The impossible actually is possible.”