Announcing the 2026-2027
Muhammad Afzaal Memorial Scholarship Awardees

Two students from The University of New Mexico are being recognized for their commitment to community service and student leadership.

Seelush Chhetri

Seelush is an undergraduate student whose commitment to community service began in her home country of Nepal. Her early interest in environmental issues grew into a broader dedication to helping others. In Nepal, she served as an executive member of Friends of the Zoo, as well as Student Council Vice President at Triyog School. After moving to Albuquerque, she served as the International Dorm Prefect, painted a mural for a church in Socorro, prepared and served food to people experiencing homelessness, performed at an Animal Humane New Mexico fundraiser, and is currently volunteering with Presbyterian Healthcare services. In fall 2026, she began serving as the Vice President of the Nepali Students Association (NSA), and the Vice President of the American Chemical Society (ACS).

“Looking back, the thread between these experiences is not leadership, volunteering, or even community service, it is attention. I have learned to pay attention to what changes, what is missing, and who might need help navigating it. From Kathmandu to Albuquerque, that attention has become my way of participating in the communities I call home.”

Atul Ojah

Atul is a Ph.D. student in the Department of Chemistry and Chemical Biology, whose community service is rooted in education, mentorship, and supporting others. Originally from Nepal, Atul began volunteering to help people in need following a devastating earthquake in 2015 and spent several years tutoring high school students. In Albuquerque, Atul has volunteered with Roadrunner Food Bank of New Mexico, and International Students Inc., a community Christian volunteer organization in Albuquerque. At UNM, he has volunteered with the Global Education Office, serves as a mentor for the Project for New Mexico Graduates of Color (PNMGC), served as a Council Representative in the Graduate and Professional Student Association (GPSA) from 2021 – 2024, and currently serves as the Secretary of the Chemistry Graduate Student Association (CGSA).

“Across these experiences, my approach to service and leadership has remained consistent: I try to identify practical ways in which my time, knowledge, and experience can make another person’s path easier. Whether tutoring students in Nepal, helping a new international student settle into Albuquerque, addressing food insecurity, or representing graduate students at UNM, I view community engagement as an obligation to contribute to the communities that have helped me grow.”

More about Muhammad Afzaal:

To honor the legacy of UNM alumnus Muhammad Afzaal Hussain, this Memorial Scholarship was established with a lead gift by Sarah and Doug Brown, former Chair of the UNM Board of Regents and Dean Emeritus of the UNM Anderson School of Management, to commemorate Mr. Hussain's dedication to community service. Mr. Hussain was tragically shot and killed in Albuquerque in August 2022. Originally from Pakistan, Muhammad Afzaal moved to New Mexico to pursue a graduate degree in Regional Planning at The University of New Mexico. While at UNM, he was active in the international student community and ran for president of the Graduate and Professional Student Association (GPSA); he won with an astounding 72% of the vote. During his term, he chaired the Student Fee Review Board and was committed to providing more transparency and equal allocation of funds. He would go on to serve as the Planning and Land Use Director for the City of Espanola.

This yearly scholarship is awarded to a UNM international undergraduate and graduate student from the Middle East or South Asia, who show a record of student leadership and service. The scholarship is designed to help pay for books, supplies, room and board, transportation, or other miscellaneous expenses related to international students' study costs at UNM.