25th Oliver Chapman Award commemorates late international student

From left: Sol Nasisi (LA ’92), Oliver Chapman, Hamid Salamipour, Enrique Cuan (LA ’92) and Aaron Wong (LA ’92) pose for a photo. Courtesy Hamid Salamipour.
After 25 years, the Oliver Chapman Leadership and Community Service Award continues to honor the legacy of Oliver Chapman, who was an international student from Panama. Each year, the award is given to a senior who has been actively involved in Tufts’ international community as a way to celebrate their achievements. This year, senior Barry Maswan won the Chapman Award.

Maswan received the award in recognition of his roles as house manager for the International House, a host advisor for Global Orientation (GO) and as a senator for the Tufts chapter of the National Society of Black Engineers. He shared that he is humbled to receive the award.

“It’s an honor and a privilege. All I’ve wanted to do since my first year [at Tufts] is to be of service, because I had a rough first year myself and the international community was a wonderful resource for me,” Maswan said. “There are a myriad of ways you can help the international community, and mine is just one way.”

The 2016 Chapman Award winner Shanice Kok (LA ’16) shared that the award is an apt remembrance of Chapman’s legacy at Tufts.

“The award is a memory for me of my time at Tufts and my time with the international community,” Kok said. “It also serves as a nice memory for the international community of how Oliver Chapman was involved in the community and inspired this award.”

Chapman passed away unexpectedly in May 1992 during his senior year. Karim Si-Ahmed (LA ’93), president of International Club in 1993, spearheaded the creation of the Chapman Award and the Oliver Chapman Fund, a fully-endowed emergency fund for international students in need.

“[The award is] given to a student that is an exemplar in
the international community at Tufts, [while] the fund was a small fund that international students in times of hardship could draw upon," Si-Ahmed said. “It was something we wanted to do to honor his memory.”

The Chapman Fund is an initiative that is close to the heart of Jane Etish-Andrews, director of the International Center, as it aims to assist international students with needs that cannot be met by their financial aid package.

“It’s not a large amount of money … but if [international students] have any little mishap when they are here, like an appendectomy or a root canal, they don’t have the resources to go back home and ask for help. This fund is going to help cushion that, in order for them to adjust or survive here,” she said.

The Chapman Award was created such that the winner is chosen by other student leaders in the Tufts community, according to Si-Ahmed.

“We thought it would be a better way of identifying students that exemplified tremendous kindness and honor,” he said.

The 2004 Chapman Award winner, Eli Levin-Goldstein (LA ’04), was especially grateful to his peers for recognizing his involvement in the international community, even though he was not an international student himself.

“[The award] was such a huge honor,” Levin-Goldstein said. “It’s nice to put in effort into a community, reaching beyond what a normal day-to-day life is at Tufts and then actually be acknowledged for that.”

Being recognized with the Chapman Award in 2006 was also extremely special to Mauricio Artiñano (LA ’06).

“I had several identities and groups while I was at Tufts,” Artiñano said. “But my first friends, my first community was the international community, so it meant a lot to be recognized by them.”

The elder brother of Oliver Chapman, Guillermo Chapman III (LA ’84), shared that the Chapman family was and remains deeply moved by the continuing legacy of the Chapman Award.

“Back then, Oliver had just passed away, so everything regarding his memory was associated with loss and sadness. All of a sudden, we unexpectedly hear that he’s being remembered and honored and somehow kept alive by friends
of his,” he said. “We were overwhelmed by emotions, because we had no expectations of something like that.”

Oliver’s generosity touched the lives of everyone who knew him, Guillermo recalled.

“Oliver was very giving, and it got to a point that sometimes you felt some kind of remorse,” he said. “It was very easy, whenever I needed a special favor … to think of Oliver right away because for him, it was a pleasure to help someone.”

Chapman shared that Oliver will always be remembered for his joyful attitude.

“Whenever Oliver had a problem, he would frown first, and after he figured [out] how he could solve the problem, he would smile right away,” he said. “Whenever he met someone who wasn’t smiling, he would tease them and make them cheer up.”

Saskia Meckman (LA ’94) won the Chapman Award in 1994 for her project, Cultural Exchange Circle, which created a space for students from multicultural backgrounds to converse about their experiences with cultural transition.

“The discussions we had were around culture, identity, cultural values or different incidents that had happened on campus or in a classroom that have made us feel uncomfortable,” she said. “It was an opportunity to talk about it openly and honestly – we [tried] to create a sacred space where people can share.”

The project was started without the help of a Tufts-recognized group, which made the award all the more meaningful for Meckman.

“[When I heard the news] I got a little choked up,” she said. “I felt like I was trying to make a change under-the-radar, and it was an honor that someone noticed.”

Etish-Andrews said that the Chapman Award carries more personal significance for the recipients than the physical award may indicate.

“We give them a plaque with their name on it, and a $100 gift certificate to Barnes & Noble,” she said. “But if you hear people talk about it, you would think it’s a million dollars. People have said that they carry the plaque from place to place as they move and put it on their desk. It truly means a lot to
Oliver Chapman’s best friend at Tufts was Hamid Salamipour (LA ’92, M ’97). While Salamipour said he was initially intimidated by Oliver, they soon grew close, sharing aspects of their cultures with each other.

“[Oliver] was curious, he wanted to learn about other people but he was very comfortable with himself,” Salamipour said. “He was loud … he was popular, he figured people out quickly and wanted them to be comfortable too. He wanted to learn from them and for them to learn from him.”

Salamipour, who is Iranian-American, said that Chapman once thoughtfully went to a Persian bakery to get a cake with a Farsi message written in icing, as a surprise for his birthday.

“I left the card [for the bakery] on my desk in our room … One day, [Chapman] came up to me and asked if he could borrow my car to go see a friend. Instead, he went to the bakery,” he said. “When he brings this cake out at the party, I was just floored. The fact that he went to the length of going to that bakery, having the cake made, with the Farsi writing on it – that was quintessential Oliver.”

On the 20th anniversary of his passing, Salamipour created a Facebook page commemorating Chapman’s legacy. The page administrators are Salamipour and two of Oliver’s elder brothers.

“I wanted his memory to be saved for all his old friends and for future generations … to remember him,” Salamipour said. “We don’t post stuff that often, but every once in a while, someone digs up an old picture or an old video and it’s just a little reminder that he is not [physically] with us, but he is [spiritually] with us.”

For Etish-Andrews, the Chapman Award and Fund are tangible ways for the Tufts community and the Chapman family to keep Oliver Chapman’s spirit alive.

“The award has just taken on a life of its own. It’s institutionalized and will continue into the future. For the Chapman family, both the award and the fund are wonderful ways for them to remember Oliver,” she said.
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