



**Dr. John Bragg's \$300,000 gift to the University of King's College
creates new MFA scholarship and guarantees Sylvia D. Hamilton Award**

For immediate release

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A \$300,000 donation from Dr. John Bragg, DCL'15, to the University of King's College will endow the first of the five Sylvia D. Hamilton Awards offered annually and create a new, endowed scholarship for students in the university's growing Master of Fine Arts programs. The gift forms part of a million-dollar investment that the River Philip Foundation (formerly the John and Judy Bragg Family Foundation) has made over the past seven years in the students and the academic mission of King's.

Valued at \$2,020, five renewable Sylvia D. Hamilton Awards are awarded each year to African Canadian students at King's, with a preference for African Nova Scotian students. The award was created in 2020 to honour the retirement from teaching of Inglis Professor Sylvia D. Hamilton, an influential writer, poet, filmmaker and visual artist who continues to shape the dialogue about, and originating from, the African Nova Scotian experience.

With the G R William Lahey MFA Scholarship, Bragg has chosen to honour King's 25th President and Vice-Chancellor with the university's first entrance scholarship exclusively for students in the Master of Fine Arts degree programs. Valued at \$2,000 per year for up to two years, the scholarship will be awarded annually to a student entering either the MFA in Creative Nonfiction or the MFA in Fiction. Two scholarships will be awarded each year.

Bragg's ongoing investment has enriched the King's community in multiple respects. Among these, it led to the creation of the [River Philip Foundation Journalism Scholarship](#) in 2020; funded additional scholarships and bursaries; and provided crucial funding toward the renovation of the HMCS King's Wardroom, the student-run lounge, café and campus pub that acts as a hub of campus social life.

Bragg gift endows a Sylvia D. Hamilton Award

In 2020, [King's announced the Sylvia D. Hamilton Awards](#), named in honour of Inglis Professor Sylvia D. Hamilton, who taught journalism and held the Rogers Chair in Communications prior to her retirement from King's that same year. In addition to her work as an educator, Hamilton

is a noted writer, poet, filmmaker and visual artist whose career has been devoted to the places, people and voices that make up the experiences of people of African descent in Canada, and in Nova Scotia in particular. Hamilton has traced back to her own ancestors, The Black Refugee-Survivors, who came to Nova Scotia in the years following the War of 1812.



Sylvia D. Hamilton, photo by Adams Photography

In recognition of Hamilton's educational legacy at King's and the impact of her ongoing creative achievements, up to five Sylvia D. Hamilton Awards are awarded each year to African Canadian students, with a focus on African Nova Scotians. The award is open to students in all degree streams, with a preference toward those studying [journalism](#) or who are enrolled in the King's/Dalhousie [Master of Fine Arts programs](#).

Bragg's gift will fully endow one Sylvia D. Hamilton Award, helping the university to guarantee that this important investment toward greater Black inclusion at King's will continue in perpetuity, and ultimately supporting stronger representation of African Canadians in the field of journalism. As a [signatory institution of the Scarborough Charter](#) on Anti-Black Racism and Black Inclusion in Canadian Higher Education, King's committed to become what President William Lahey described as "a university where Black students, faculty and staff can flourish, including because of our strong collaborative relationships with Black communities."

Lahey says that guaranteeing the longevity of this award is integral to that work. "With Dr. John Bragg's gift, King's takes an important step forward on the path we committed to when we created this award, and again when we joined the inter-institutional forum created by the Scarborough Charter. The Sylvia D. Hamilton Awards will continue benefitting African Canadian students and the King's community for years to come, and I look forward to securing the future of additional awards that will support this work."

Hamilton says she felt "overwhelmed" on learning that one of the awards in her name is now fully endowed. "What a wonderful development and such good news to take into 2023. This warms my heart and I know the hearts of my family and my ancestors."

Bragg's donation creates King's first dedicated MFA scholarship

Bragg's gift additionally funds the university's first entrance scholarship dedicated to students in King's two MFA programs. The G R William Lahey MFA Scholarship is a renewable \$2,000 scholarship available to students entering the [MFA in Creative Nonfiction](#) or the new [MFA in Fiction](#), which will welcome its first cohort in June 2023.

Two scholarships will be awarded annually, with preference to Black and Indigenous students, or students from other underrepresented groups. Students from Atlantic Canada will also be given preference.

King's innovative MFA in Creative Nonfiction has steadily gained recognition for its exceptional quality since the university, then led by George Cooper, launched the degree in 2013. The MFA programs' unique format immerses candidates in the writer's craft while delivering an in-depth orientation to the publishing industry, that includes one-on-one sessions with publishing executives in Toronto and New York. Graduates of the Creative Nonfiction program have gone on to publish close to 50 books with top Canadian, U.S. and international publishers, and garnered awards and accolades in Canada and beyond.

The MFAs' accessibility relative to comparable advanced degrees is considered integral to the span of dynamic writers they attract. Delivered through a low-residency model, students attend in-person sessions for only two weeks each year. This removes a significant barrier to access for the wide range of students who thrive in the program, many of whom have families, careers and other commitments that bind them to locations outside the province. By reducing the financial barrier of advanced education, the G R William Lahey MFA Scholarships will strengthen the programs' appeal to emergent voices and continue building the School of Journalism, Writing & Publishing's reputation as a hub of new talent.

"I'm very pleased to learn of the gift from the River Philip Foundation that will provide scholarships to our MFA students," says Director of Writing & Publishing Gillian Turnbull. "The award comes at a moment when we're looking to broaden the range of perspectives brought to the program; it will help support students who may face systemic barriers in attending graduate school and beginning a professional writing career. We're excited to honour the first recipients and look forward to the work they develop here at King's."



President William Lahey, photo by Adams Photography

Naming this award, Bragg elected to honour King's President and Vice-Chancellor William Lahey, who became president of King's in 2016. The scholarships' awarding preference reflects the work Lahey has undertaken throughout his presidency, and [in keeping with his mandate](#), to support greater equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility in all areas of academic and campus life at King's.

Lahey says Bragg's decision to name the scholarship after him left him feeling "humbled."

“In their sustained generosity, Dr. Bragg and his wife Judy Bragg have shown their belief in King’s academic mission and in its power to change lives. This power is something that we see manifested in a truly unique way in our writing and publishing programs. One of the defining goals of my mandate as university president is to ensure that the power to change lives is made accessible to a much broader population than it has in the past. Empowering more voices to take their seat at the table and tell their stories is such an important arm of this work and I am humbled that Dr. Bragg has opted to create this scholarship in my name.”

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About the University of King’s College

Established in 1789, King's College is Canada's oldest chartered university and is associated with Dalhousie University. A small and extraordinarily lively academic community located in Halifax (Kjipuktuk), Nova Scotia, King's is known nationally and internationally for its highly acclaimed interdisciplinary programs in the humanities, including its renowned Foundation Year Program, its professional programs in journalism and its fine arts programs in creative writing.

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