

THE FELLOWSHIP

The **Molloy University Partnership for Global Justice Fellowship** is committed to the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and requires the fellow to become familiar with each of the UN goals, especially as they pertain to Long Island. The Fellowship also necessitates the fellow to select a goal and undertake a project to address that goal locally.

Drawing on her personal experiences as a first-generation college student, Kritika embarked on a project to expand the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) in New York State. Her project focused on increasing accessibility to higher education for all students, particularly those from underrepresented and economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Kritika conducted a comprehensive analysis of the current income threshold for TAP and its impact on students, with a specific focus on how the \$80,000 limit excludes many middle-income families. She highlighted the struggles of families who have more than one child entering college and the need for adjustments to keep pace with inflation.

Kritika participated in trips to the New York State Capitol in Albany to engage directly with legislators. She presented compelling arguments and data illustrating the benefits of expanding TAP, emphasizing how raising the income eligibility limit would make over 25,000 additional students eligible for financial aid.

Kritika held multiple tabling events on campus to raise awareness among students about the importance of TAP. These events facilitated direct engagement, allowing students to share their personal stories and send emails to their representatives advocating for increased TAP funding.

As the chair of the Student Advocacy Board on Molloy Student Government, Kritika mobilized resources and support from various sectors of the university. She encouraged students, alumni, educators, and other stakeholders to join her advocacy efforts.

Through these efforts, Kritika not only advanced the mission of the Molloy University Partnership for Global Justice Fellowship but also made significant strides toward enhancing educational accessibility and equity. Her dedication and hard work achieved results and have laid the foundation for ongoing advocacy and continued progress in ensuring that all students can pursue higher education without the burden of financial constraints.

FELLOW PROFILE



KRITIKA BEDI

Sophomore - Graduating in May 2026

- Double major in Political Science and Philosophy, Minor in American Studies, Experiential Academy
- Summer Academy - Global Citizenship - Accumulated Awareness of UN Sustainable Development Goals, Evaluate and assess Global and Local issues with an informed perspective
- New York Student Aid Alliance Advocacy Day
- Advocated for an increase in financial aid educational programs on the state level in Albany

ORGANIZATIONS:

- Molloy Student Ambassador 2022-2024
- Student Advocacy - Chair on Molloy Student Government 2022-2024
- Sustainability Committee - Chair on Molloy Student Government 2023-2024
- Philosophy Club - Secretary 2022-2024
- Mock Trial - Defendant Lawyer 2022-2023
- Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Chair for 2024-2025 on Molloy Student Government
- Service trip to Puerto Rico

IN KRITIKA'S OWN WORDS

INTRODUCTION:

The Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) in New York State is a cornerstone of financial aid for college students, playing a crucial role in making higher education accessible and affordable. However, its current limitations prevent many students from fully benefiting from its potential. This is especially challenging for first-generation college students, like myself, who come from lower-income families and often lack the financial resources necessary to cover the costs of higher education without substantial aid.

When I received acceptance letters from prestigious universities like American University and Penn State, I couldn't attend because I didn't have the financial privilege to afford them, nor could I ask my mother to cover these costs. Instead, I had to choose a university that offered the most financial support and stability, relying heavily on programs like TAP.

Current TAP income limits and the lack of adjustments for inflation exacerbate these financial challenges, making college less accessible. As a first-generation student unfamiliar with the complexities of financial aid applications and without family guidance, attending college was not just about personal achievement but also about breaking the cycle of limited educational attainment in my family. Without sufficient financial support, many students are forced to take on excessive work hours or drop out altogether to manage their finances.

My top priority has been to raise awareness about TAP, advocate for its funding, and ensure it is accessible to all students. First-generation students represent a significant

portion of the student population and need adequate support to reduce educational inequality and promote social mobility. By securing adequate funding for TAP, we can create the stability students need to focus on their studies and complete their degrees.

The importance of expanding TAP cannot be overstated. It is a crucial investment in the future of New York's students and the state's economic prosperity. Advocating for legislation to increase the TAP income limit and restore graduate TAP aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4, which seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.



PROJECT OBJECTIVES:



I have been advocating for the expansion of the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) since my freshman year, and this year marks my eighth semester dedicated to this cause. For the first

time, I visited the capitol in Albany to share our life stories with legislators, emphasizing the significance of TAP for students across New York State. We asked them to support our higher education dreams by backing bills aimed at increasing TAP funding.

This project aimed to assess the current limitations of TAP, focusing on the impact of its income threshold on students. Specifically, we analyzed how the \$80,000 limit excludes many middle-income families, particularly those with more than one child entering college, a situation faced by many students at Molloy University. Our objectives included:

- Evaluating how current TAP funding and eligibility criteria fail to keep pace with inflation.
- Estimating the number of additional students who would benefit from raising the income limit to \$110,000.
- Highlighting how expanding TAP aligns with global efforts to reduce educational inequality and promote economic sustainability.
- Developing strategies to engage students in supporting the proposed TAP

expansions through awareness campaigns and collaborative initiatives.

- By addressing these objectives, this report provides a comprehensive analysis and actionable recommendations to enhance TAP, thereby supporting the educational and economic future of New York State.

Specific Goals for Expanding the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP)

- **Increase the Income Eligibility Threshold:** Raise the income limit from \$80,000 to \$110,000 to make TAP accessible to more middle-income families. This change would make over 25,000 additional students eligible, addressing the gap between current limits and the actual cost of living and education.
- **Adjust for Inflation:** Align the TAP income threshold with inflation, setting it at approximately \$125,000. The current limit falls short by one-third of its modern-day value and adjusting for inflation ensures the program remains relevant and effective.
- **Restore Graduate TAP:** Reinstate the Graduate TAP program to provide state assistance for students pursuing advanced degrees. Addressing workforce shortages in critical fields like healthcare, education, and STEM by supporting graduate students can help meet New York's economic and professional needs.
- **Legislative Advocacy:** Advocate for the passage of legislative bills that support these changes to TAP. Working with policymakers and stakeholders to highlight the benefits of expanded TAP will be

crucial in securing the necessary legislative support and funding.

- **Increase TAP Funding:** Secure additional state funding to support the expanded eligibility and restored programs. Adequate funding is essential to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of TAP in supporting a larger and more diverse student population.
- **Promote Awareness and Accessibility:** Enhance outreach and communication strategies to ensure that eligible students are aware of and can access TAP benefits. Increasing awareness and simplifying the application process can help more students take advantage of TAP, maximizing its impact on educational accessibility.



METHODS AND EXECUTIONS:



Participation in CICU Annual Advocacy Day:

Due to poor weather conditions, I participated in the Commission on Independent Colleges and Universities (CICU) annual Advocacy Day via Zoom. This event allowed me to connect with elected officials and emphasize the importance of expanding TAP, sharing our compelling stories about why TAP matters to us and the need to restore funding for opportunity programs such as CSTEP, STEP, and TRIO.

The lobbying efforts led to a positive reception and increased awareness among legislators regarding the importance of TAP expansion. I secured initial support commitments from several assembly members, indicating a favorable outlook for proposed bills. Many legislators were previously unaware of this issue, and these discussions were essential in putting TAP on their radar and highlighting its potential impact on students.

To advocate for the expansion of the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) and ensure its accessibility for all New York students, several strategic methods and execution steps were undertaken:

Legislative Lobbying:

Direct Engagement with Legislators: I traveled to the New York State Capitol in Albany to engage directly with legislators and assembly members. During these visits, I presented compelling arguments and data illustrating the benefits of expanding TAP. Face-to-face lobbying was crucial in humanizing the issue and highlighting its real-life impact on students.

Meetings with Key Legislators:

I had discussions with several key legislators and assembly members to secure their support. These meetings were instrumental in garnering attention and commitment from influential policymakers.



Student Engagement and Awareness Campaigns:

To raise awareness among students and mobilize them to advocate for TAP expansion,

I organized and held two tabling events on campus. These events served as platforms to engage with students directly, provide information, and gather support.



Over 50 students were motivated to send emails to their respective officials, expressing their concerns and advocating for increased TAP funding. These events provided valuable feedback from students who shared their personal experiences and concerns, highlighting the critical role of TAP in their educational pursuits. Many students who stopped by the table were previously unaware of the TAP issue and left with a clear understanding of its importance, thus broadening the base of informed advocates.

The high engagement level, with over 50 students participating in the email campaign, resulted in many receiving responses from their officials, indicating that the message was reaching the right ears. This increased student awareness and concern about TAP, leading to a more informed and active student body. I received testimonials from students at Molloy University expressing that without TAP, they might not be able to continue their education, underscoring the program's necessity.

Community and Stakeholder Engagement:

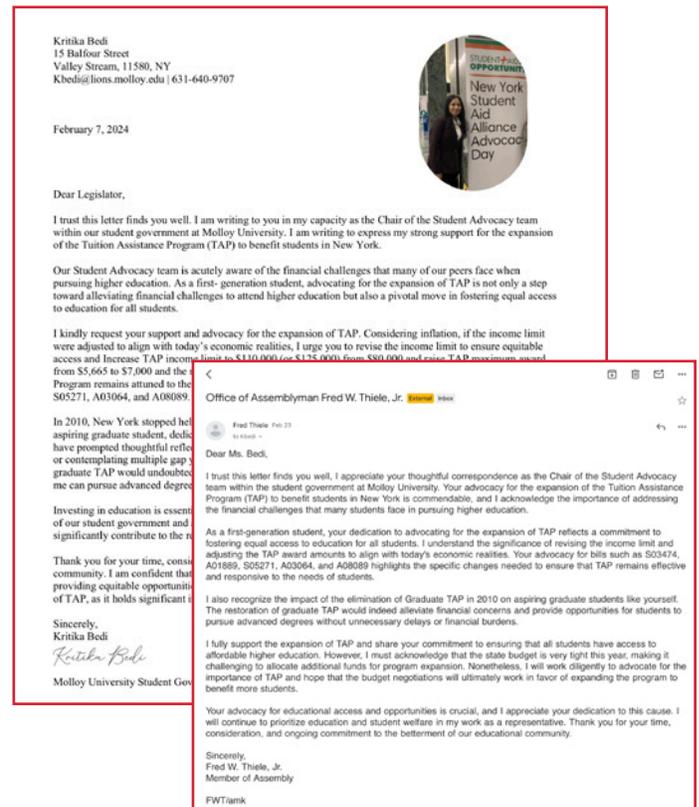
As the chair of the Student Advocacy Board on Molloy Student Government, I continued to prioritize TAP expansion in our weekly meetings. We included links to support TAP on our agendas every Tuesday.

Guest Speakers:

At the beginning of the school year, we invited Demo and Neal in their capacity as Molloy's government affairs spokespeople to be guest speakers and discuss the issues of New York State cutting funds for TAP. Their talks helped mobilize resources and support for the campaign.

Collaboration with Molloy Student Government:

We reached out to each sector of Molloy Student Government to ask for their support for TAP expansion. We encouraged them to send letters to their elected officials, seeking support for the expansion of TAP.



CAPACITY BUILDING, EDUCATION, AND OUTREACH ACTIVITIES:

To actively advocate for the expansion of the Tuition Assistance Program, Molloy Student Government played a major role in advocating for the campaign. Molloy Student Government holds its meeting every week on Tuesdays at 3:30 PM. As the Chair of the Student Advocacy board, I provided information to the members of the student government on understanding the legislative process and how to effectively communicate with policymakers. My major goal for last semester was to hold table days in the Public Square building on the Molloy University campus due to its ongoing traffic of students going in and out of the building. It also has a lounge area where students can study or hangout.

This was the perfect building to spread awareness of the TAP campaign. I was provided with a table and chairs from the work order that student affairs had put in for me. I printed multiple flyers that had information toolkits that included data on TAP, talking points from the Commission on Independent Colleges and Universities website, as well as the flyers that Demo had provided for students to read or take with them.

I also created a QR code that students scanned, the QR code directed them to a link which directed to a toolkit provided on CICU.org website. The link has a pre-made

letter template that is sent out to a student's elected officials after they input their address into the webform. Students were also able to share their experiences to urge legislation to support the proposed changes. I made a flyer for the table day that I was posted on both Molloy Student Government and Student Advocacy Instagram accounts.

**PROTECT
NEW YORK STATE'S
STUDENT AID FROM
PROPOSED CUTS**

Stop by our table on **Tuesday, March 26,**
12:30 - 2:00 PM or **Thursday April 4,**
12:15 - 2:00 PM in **Public Square Lobby**

*Now it's your turn to Stand up for Student Aid and
ask your legislators in Albany to do their part.*

MOLLOY STUDENT
GOVERNMENT


More information can be found at:
Cicu.org

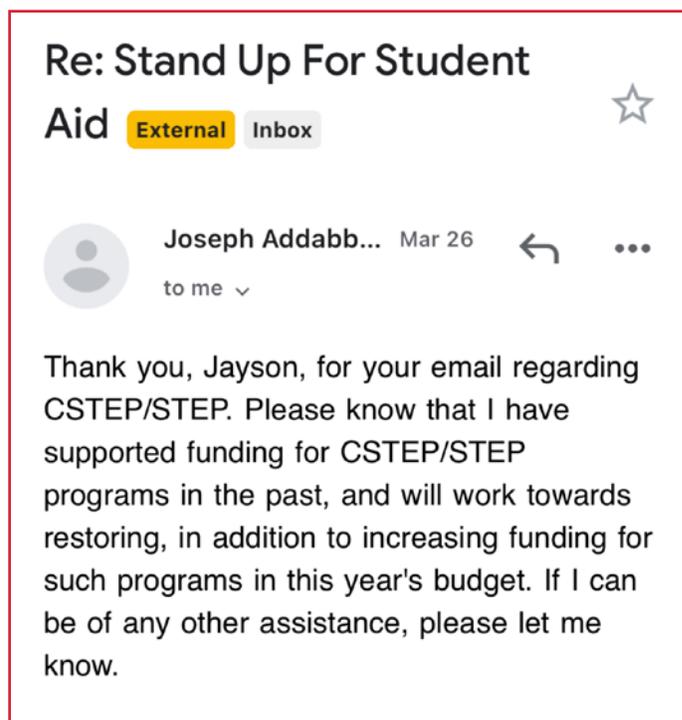
**Questions? Contact Student Advocacy Chair,
Kritika Bedi, kbedi@lions.molloy.edu**

PROJECT OUTCOMES:

As a result of continuous lobbying efforts and campaigns hosted at Molloy University, the New York State Legislature approved an increase in TAP funding, raising the income eligibility threshold from \$80,000 to \$125,000. This adjustment aligns the program with today's economic realities, making over 25,000 additional students eligible for TAP. During the tabling events I hosted on campus to promote TAP campaigns and encourage students to send letters to their legislators, many students shared that they had not received any TAP money due to their parents' income, even though that income supported multiple family members in pursuing education. The increased funding and broader eligibility criteria will alleviate some financial burdens for middle-income families, enabling more students to afford higher education without compromising their financial stability.

On April 22, 2024, Governor Kathy Hochul announced key initiatives to support students and increase access to higher education in the FY 2025 Budget. She stated, "In the FY 2025 Budget, we are taking critical steps toward expanding access to financial aid and ensuring every New York student can continue their education." The FY 2025 Budget increases the minimum TAP award from \$500 to \$1,000. It also raises the income eligibility limit from \$80,000 to \$125,000, the married student Net Taxable Income (NTI) limit from \$40,000 to \$60,000, and the independent single student NTI limit from \$10,000 to \$30,000.

The tabling events held on campus were highly effective in raising awareness about TAP among students. Over 50 students were directly engaged, resulting in a substantial number of emails sent to legislators. Many students received responses from their



representatives, indicating a high level of engagement and concern from officials. Students who were previously unaware of this issue gained a deeper understanding and became advocates themselves, amplifying the campaign's reach. I encouraged students to use personal stories to help humanize the issue of cutting student aid for policymakers, making the need for TAP expansion more relatable and urgent.

During spring break, while on a service trip with Molloy University in Puerto Rico, Demo reached out to me and to Jessica Gilbert, who has contributed tremendously to this campaign and has been a leading advocate for raising awareness on and off campus. Demo asked if we would be open to talking to reporter Keisha Clukey for a Newsday article titled, "NYS Senate, Assembly Budget Proposals Would Increase TAP Funding." I had the opportunity to share my personal experience with TAP. Clukey quoted me:

“Kritika Bedi, 19, a Valley Stream resident and sophomore at Molloy University, said TAP has really helped her, especially as a first-generation college student. ‘We kind of did struggle with money and financial aid and TAP really helped me pursue higher education ... and attend Molloy as a private, Catholic institution,’ she told Newsday. ‘Everything is so expensive, even groceries,’ she said, so the change in income threshold would make a big difference.”

Sharing my experience and discussing the significance of financial aid in this article was a turning point for me, making me realize that this campaign is reaching a broad audience, including students and parents, and highlighting the possibilities if our voices are heard.

On March 4, 2024, Molloy University released an article called “Empowering Education: Molloy University’s Impactful Presence at Long Island Lobby Day.” The article detailed Jessica’s second trip to Albany and her third time lobbying for TAP expansion, spreading more awareness about the campaign. This article was shared on Molloy University’s official Family Hub Newsletter and their LinkedIn account.

Newsday
NYS SENATE, ASSEMBLY BUDGET PROPOSALS WOULD INCREASE TAP FUNDING
 By Keshia Clukey
 March 14, 2024

Affordability, attracting students
 Addressing the affordability of higher education through TAP would also benefit public and private institutions that may be dealing with financial and enrollment declines, Fahy and higher education groups said.

“We certainly welcome the adjustments to TAP, especially the increases in the awards and raising the income level, that may help bring in more students,” said Fred Kowal, president of United University Professions, the union that represents State University of New York employees.

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“We kind of did struggle with money and financial aid, and TAP really helped me pursue higher education ... and attend Molloy as a private, Catholic institution,” she told Newsday. “Everything is so expensive, even groceries,” she said, so the change in income threshold would make a big difference.

But whether it ends up in the final budget could come down to cost.

The Senate’s TAP expansion plan would cost \$138 million, while the Assembly’s plan is an estimated \$118.3 million.

Hochul spokeswoman Katy Zielinski said the governor will work with the legislature to ensure the final budget invests in the state’s future while ensuring New York remains on a stable, long-term fiscal trajectory.

Updating TAP
 The Tuition Assistance Program, which was created 50 years ago, is awarded to New York State residents attending public and independent colleges. More than 235,000 students received more than \$718 million

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“To have such a low cutoff is really unfair to high-cost regions like Long Island and New York City,” said Neal Lewis, director of the Office of Government and Community Affairs at Molloy University in Rockville Centre. The \$80,000 income threshold is an “outdated cutoff,” he said.



On Friday, May 3, 2024, Jessica and I were invited to President James Lentini’s office to be acknowledged for our work on the TAP issue and to take pictures for Molloy’s website and media release. We had the opportunity to share our experiences and express our excitement about seeing our advocacy efforts contribute to the outcome of TAP expansion.

FUTURE PLANS AND FOLLOW-UPS:

While we have achieved some success in expanding TAP, the restoration of Graduate TAP remains a critical goal. Financial assistance for graduate studies is essential for many students to continue their education immediately after their undergraduate studies. I plan to continue organizing trips to the state capital to meet with legislators and advocate for the full restoration of Graduate TAP. These visits will include not only students but also Molloy alumni, educators, and other stakeholders who can provide diverse perspectives on this issue.

Working with local businesses and industry leaders who can advocate for a skilled workforce will be essential. Highlighting how Graduate TAP contributes to meeting their employment needs will strengthen our case. Collaboration with professional associations in fields such as healthcare, education, and STEM will also be beneficial. By emphasizing

the critical need for graduate-level education support, we can amplify our message and demonstrate the widespread impact of this issue.

Monitoring the implementation of the recent TAP expansion to ensure it reaches the intended beneficiaries is also a priority. Collecting data on enrollment and retention rates among students who are now newly eligible for TAP will provide valuable insights. This data will be instrumental in advocating for the restoration of Graduate TAP.

The fight for TAP expansion is an ongoing effort that requires sustained advocacy and continuous public engagement. With collective action, we can continue to push for changes that will make higher education more accessible and affordable for all New York students.

PERSONAL IMPACT:

Education is a powerful tool for community development and social mobility. Advocating for the expansion of the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) as a first-generation student has had a profound personal impact on me. Engaging in this advocacy has been empowering, allowing me to develop valuable skills in public speaking, negotiation, and policy analysis—skills I struggled with during my freshman year. My advocacy journey has given me the opportunity to be a voice for students like myself who face unique challenges in accessing higher education. By lobbying for TAP expansion, I have highlighted these issues directly to policymakers, pushing for changes that will benefit countless students not only at Molloy University but across New York State.

I am proud to say that the tireless efforts of everyone involved in this fight will soon result in the benefits of TAP expansion. This achievement aligns with the global objective

of ensuring quality education for all. My peers will be able to rely on this program, as I have since 2022, and continue their educational journeys without the overwhelming stress of financial instability.

I would like to thank Barbara Black for offering students this opportunity to be a Partnership for Global Justice Fellow. This fellowship has changed me forever, as I have witnessed firsthand the struggles students face in pursuing higher education. Engaging in this project has aligned with my aspirations to be a social justice leader and potentially a lawyer. It provided firsthand experience that is valuable for my legal education and future practice while allowing me to focus on areas where I can improve my skills and have a significant impact on my community. I have truly enjoyed and felt fulfilled by my work on this project, and I will continue to advocate for equitable education in the future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

The *Sustainability Institute at Molloy University* acknowledges the generous endowment to establish the **Partnership for Global Justice Fellowship at Molloy University** and is very proud to be administering this unique opportunity for Molloy students. Since its establishment, this competitive fellowship continues to generate quite a bit of interest from many worthy applicants, and in keeping with Molloy's mission, has provided a meaningful student experience while contributing directly to the identification of approaches to ending, or at least mitigating, environmentally or socially damaging decision-making on Long Island.

