

Friends of Alan Turing Fund

This scholarship was created by Lora Volkert in 2013 for LGBTQ and ally students majoring in STEM (science, technology, engineering and/or math) fields. This scholarship was first awarded in 2014.

Alan Turing's Story:

Considered by many to be the father of computer science, Alan Turing's theories and discoveries helped determine what computers are capable of today. In addition to his contribution to computer sciences, Turing refused to keep his homosexuality a secret during a time when it was socially unacceptable and unlawful. In 1934, by the age of 24, Turing began his groundbreaking work providing the underpinnings of computation. He later became known for his theories about artificial intelligence, and wrote software for one of the first computers. During WWII, he worked for the British government gathering intelligence using his decoding skills to break Nazi codes. Shortly after the war, Turing was arrested for homosexuality. He was forced to give up his work for the defense department, as known homosexuals could not gain security clearance in the government. At the age of 42, Turing died of cyanide poisoning that was eventually deemed suicide.

In 2009, then Prime Minister Gordon Brown publicly apologized for this cruel treatment. Turing is expected to receive a posthumous pardon in October 2013, after a recent government push to pardon the over 49,000 gay men who were convicted under the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment act.



Alan Turing

Words from the Creator:

After having served on Pride Foundation scholarship committees for a few years, I was always impressed with the caliber of the students who apply, particularly those in the STEM fields. I am a former journalist, but after being let go from the newspaper where I worked, I went back to school for a computer science degree and became a software developer.

For me, the STEM fields have been completely transformative, and I believe that the discoveries and advances that scientists, engineers, and others in technological fields make have the ability to change all our lives for the better. I was fortunate enough to earn a scholarship from the National Science Foundation when I went back to school. Having financial support made it much easier for me to focus on my degree and balance my work with my studies so that I could finish my degree quickly.

All of this inspired me to start the fund, but I don't want this fund to be about me. It's about the promise of the students I see going into STEM fields. It's about the great work Pride Foundation does in serving the underserved LGBTQ community by providing these scholarships. It's about something much larger than me. That's why I wanted to name the fund for Alan Turing. Turing's theories about computing, artificial intelligence, and computer architecture made many of the technical advances since the middle of the last century possible. But because of the social norms and laws of his time, he was forced to endure chemical castration to avoid going to prison simply for being gay.

LGBTQ rights have come a long way since then, but we still have a long way to go. I only hope that this fund can make a small difference for LGBTQ students who all too often still face enormous difficulties.

Lora Volkert lives in Boise, Idaho.