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## Student is on to her next challenge

By Tony Biasotti, [tbiasotti@VenturaCountyStar.com](mailto:tbiasotti@VenturaCountyStar.com)  
July 2, 2006

No one would accuse Ellen Adams of taking the easy way through anything.

When she was in middle school in Spokane, Wash., she decided that the local high schools wouldn't present enough of a challenge. She said she chose the Thacher School, a prestigious college preparatory school in Ojai, because "it sounded like a great adventure."



After she graduated from Thacher with honors, she spent a year in Spain at the University of Granada.

Now 19, Adams will start her first year at Princeton University in the fall. Again, she chose the school in part for the challenge; Princeton has a rare senior thesis program for undergraduates.

Along the way, Adams ran into a whole new set of challenges that she hadn't sought out. During her senior year at Thacher, she told her parents that she was bisexual, and they stopped supporting her, financially and otherwise, she said. To pay for her Princeton education — where tuition, room and board are more than \$40,000 a year — she has won a raft of scholarships. At the top of the list is the Matthew Shepard Point Scholarship, awarded last month to Adams and two other students from a pool of more than 1,300 applicants.

The scholarship is funded by the Point Foundation and the Matthew Shepard Foundation, both organizations that help gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students. Thirty students were Point Scholars this year, but only the top three were awarded the Shepard Scholarship.

The foundations don't disclose the amount of each scholarship, but the average is \$12,500 of direct aid, along with mentoring and other support that brings the total to more than \$33,000, Point Foundation Chairman John Pence said.

Adams said she plans to study international relations at Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. She'll also study comparative literature in both Spanish and French, and, in her spare time, she might pursue a certificate in fixed-meter poetry.

"I would love to be a writer, but it's always good to have a fall-back plan," she said in a phone interview from a summer camp in northern Idaho, where she's working as a counselor.

At Thacher, Adams published a few literary 'zines — small, do-it-yourself magazines — and started a 'zine library on campus. She also started Thacher's Gay-Straight Alliance club. Many of the other Point Scholars founded similar groups at their high schools, but few had the support that Adams said she enjoyed from teachers, administrators and fellow students.

"It sounds cheesy, but the morals of the school — honor, fairness, kindness, truth — when they're put into action, it's beautiful," she said. "It made for a very accepting environment. ... Compared to some of the horror stories I've heard about, I feel very lucky."

Like the rest of the scholars, Adams was picked because she's shown the potential to be a leader, Pence said.

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