Anthony Tabet
Fellowship awarded to support work towards a PhD in chemical engineering at MIT

Raised in both a town outside of Beirut, Lebanon, and in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Anthony Tabet is not afraid of the uncomfortably hot or the bitter cold. Born after a civil war that nearly killed his entire paternal family and forced them to flee to the countryside, Anthony immigrated to the United States with his parents in search of opportunity and freedom from violence.

Anthony went to high school in a city close to the University of Minnesota and began his university studies full time when he was sixteen. He fell in love with the chemical sciences, majored in chemical engineering, and worked in both the Massari Lab and the Wang Lab on polymeric materials for energy and biomedical applications.

Anthony’s undergraduate training was supported by a Wallin Scholarship, Barry Goldwater Scholarship, and an Astronaut Foundation Scholarship. He received an Amgen Scholarship to support a summer research project at Stanford University, where he worked in the Heilshorn Lab to create inks for 3D bioprinting. After graduating, he traveled to Cambridge University as a Churchill Scholar and received an MPhil in chemistry, working in the Scherman Lab on stimuli-sensitive hydrogels for biomedical applications in the central nervous system.

Anthony is passionate about translating research ideas from the lab into a commercialized technology. While living in Minneapolis, Anthony became frustrated with the barriers entrepreneurs face in starting companies in the Midwest. He cofounded the company CoCreateX to streamline how scientists and engineers find resources, capital, and community. When Anthony was 21, he was named to Minnesota Business Magazine’s “35 Under 35.”

Now pursuing a PhD in chemical engineering at MIT, Anthony is creating brain-machine interfaces that can permanently integrate into the brain and be used to study or treat brain tumors like glioblastoma. After his training, Anthony hopes to start a research lab at a university that can perform both fundamental and translational research on technologies that can improve human health in the most challenging-to-treat diseases.

We asked Anthony to tell us a little bit more about himself and some of his educational experiences. Please feel free to use these quotes.

On the University of Minnesota and Minnesota being welcoming to New Americans: At a time when anti-immigrant sentiment is rising at an alarming rate, the state of Minnesota has and continues to be a steadfast national leader in supporting immigrants and New Americans. I really cannot overstate the extent to which I owe my entire career to the investments the state and the University of Minnesota made in me. The state was tremendously welcoming to my family and me as new immigrants from the Middle East. They gave me the opportunity to start as a full time college student, tuition-free, when I was 16 years old through the PSEO program. Paid research opportunities with Professor Aaron Massari and Professor Chun Wang let me focus on learning how to be a scientist without having to take extra campus jobs. If you go look around the Departments of Chemistry, Biomedical Engineering, and Chemical Engineering & Materials
Science, you will have a hard time finding a lab without undergraduate students conducting research. It is a very welcoming environment to new trainees, which lowers the barrier to entry for students including many New Americans who are interested in starting a scientific career.

**A historical figure you look up to:** Robert Kennedy

**Number of languages you speak fluently:** Two: English and Arabic

**Dream mentor (someone who is currently alive):** Elon Musk

**Favorite film, TV show, or book that connects to migration/immigration or the New American experience in the US:** Sense8

**A well-known or documented quote that inspires you:** "We all do better when we all do better." - Paul Wellstone

**Favorite smartphone app:** TikTok

**Why do you love your field?** I love the fields of biomaterials and neural engineering because they allow me to utilize my background in materials chemistry to create technologies that have the potential to improve the lives of patients.

**What did you look for in a graduate program?** In deciding on a graduate program, I looked for departments and institutions that were multi-disciplinary and could apply quantitative first methods to challenging neurological problems. I sought training that would allow me to take on the world's most pernicious diseases—in particular brain cancer—on multiple fronts: apply quantitative first principles to study the disease and find where it is susceptible to intervention, then engineer technologies to fill those needs. MIT has a top neural-engineering research group and a rigorous first year course schedule that has given me a strong technical foundation.

**What advice would you give other New Americans who are interested in applying to graduate school?** There are two important factors to consider when choosing a graduate school. First, you should not go to a university unless there is a professor whose research closely aligns with your scientific interests and is someone you think you can work with for five years. Second, make sure the university you go to has a sense of community. Community is broad and something you define for yourself. Just make sure there are people you can enjoy spending time with outside of classes or research.

**Have you faced imposter syndrome? If so, how have you or do you work to overcome it?** I have battled with imposter syndrome since I was an undergraduate student. When I'm starting to feel as though I don't belong or am undeserving of the opportunities I've been given, I think back to all the long nights in the library, or other tough moments in my education, and how I persevered. Reminding myself of the tough periods I have already overcome helps ground me and gives me the strength to push through. In these moments, having a supporting community by my side also helps me push through it.

**What does being a New American mean to you?** Being a New American means having intersectional identities. It means that you come from a cultural background that gives you a
different and valuable perspective on challenges and opportunities. Coming of age as a New American means recognizing that you have something unique to offer, and you may have unique biases to overcome. For me, being a part of multiple communities helps me see the shared values between groups of people that, on the outside, appear very different. This intersectional identity makes me appreciate the shared human values that transcend borders.