Since 1973, the Boston Scholars program has awarded more than $139 million in scholarships to 1,797 students.

By Cynthia K. Buccini

When Rosanna LoGrasso arrived at BU as a freshman in 2009, her family’s expectations were high. Her parents, neither of whom had gone to college, had immigrated to the United States at a young age, her mother from Uruguay, her father from Italy. Neither could speak English, and each had only a few hundred dollars.

LoGrasso was a Boston High School Scholar, a BU program that each year awards four-year, full-tuition scholarships to graduating seniors from the city’s public high schools. It all made the transition from East Boston High School to BU “a bit nerve-racking,” recalls LoGrasso.

But the sociology major soon found caring mentors and supportive professors. She immersed herself in college life, attending student performances and athletic events, volunteering through the Community Service Center, working in internships, living in London through the Study Abroad program, becoming a College of Arts & Sciences Dean’s Host, and joining the Pre-Law Society, the Mock Mediation team, and the Boston Scholars Club. She plans to become a lawyer, aiming to be a prosecutor in a district attorney’s office.

“None of this would have been possible if I hadn’t received this award,” says LoGrasso (CGS’11, CAS’13), who spoke at this year’s ceremony honoring the incoming class of 22 Boston High School Scholars.

Since its founding in 1973, the program has awarded more than $139 million in scholarships to 1,797 students. Nominated by their schools, students must be in the top 10 percent of their class and have a minimum GPA of 3.0 and a combined SAT score of 1650 or higher. Scholars are chosen, from a list of nominees who have been admitted to the University, by a three-member committee made up of representatives from the University, the public schools, and the mayor’s office. “The students we get are high-performing,” says Ruth Shane, director of BU’s Boston Public Schools Collaborative and advisor to the students. “They have been outstanding in their high schools.” (See sidebars.)

In 2009, the University expanded the program, establishing the Community Service Award Program, which provides Boston public high school students with grants, scholarships, and other assistance to fully meet their financial need without loans. Those students (there are 41 in the Class of 2016) perform 25 hours of community service each semester, starting in the spring of their freshman year.

Among the other scholarships awarded this year were four-year, full-tuition Cardinal Medeiros Scholarships to 12 graduating seniors in the Archdiocese of Boston parochial high schools. Since that program began in 1986, the University has given scholarships valued at nearly $40 million to 374 students from the archdiocese.
The Singer

Katy Lazar always wanted to be a performing artist. She began singing at age four, took dance lessons and acted in musical theater as a kid, and dreamed of attending Boston Arts Academy. “The Wizard of Oz was my favorite movie, and I would dress up as Dorothy, or Belle from Beauty and the Beast and sing all of the songs and act it out,” says Lazar (CFA’16). By the time the South Boston teenager was a junior at Boston Arts Academy, a high school for the visual and performing arts, she had experimented with jazz and classical singing and was thinking about studying voice performance in college. But it was a summer spent at the Boston University Tanglewood Institute (BUTI), a summer training program for aspiring high school musicians, that fixed her plans. “We were doing so much work,” says Lazar, a mezzo-soprano. “We’d have classes, we’d have lessons, we’d have to practice on our own. But it never felt like work to me. It just felt like something I love to do that was really fun.”

Lazar had plenty of stage experience during her four years at Boston Arts Academy, singing with the school’s Spiritual Ensemble and singing the national anthem at the mayor’s annual State of the City address. When she entered BU this fall, she became the first Boston High School Scholar to attend the College of Fine Arts. She is majoring in voice performance and studying with Phyllis Hoffman (CFA’61,’67), a CFA professor of music and director of BUTI. Lazar worked with Hoffman at BUTI. “I’m very excited,” she says. CKB
In 2009, Rami Yazbeck and his younger brother left their parents and three other siblings in the northern Lebanese town of Jbeil to come to the United States. Yazbeck was 16 years old, a sophomore in high school. “Education was the main reason,” says Yazbeck (ENG’16). “There is better education here, better colleges. And a better future.”

Yazbeck could understand only a few words of English, but the hardest part, he says, was leaving family, friends, and his hometown. Here, he lived with his aunt and uncle, an electrical engineer, in Dorchester, and learned English by taking ESL classes, talking to people, reading, and watching TV. Last spring, he graduated from the Boston Community Leadership Academy.

Yazbeck is undecided about his major at the College of Engineering, but he has a passion for physics and math. “I want to learn those subjects, and apply them to the real world,” he says. CKB
The Future Physician

There’s a story to Iniko Jacobs’ given name. “It’s African for ‘in times of trouble,’” says Jacobs. “The story goes that my family was having a rough patch around the time I was born, so they felt my name should somehow capture the situation. People have put their own spin on it as time goes on, but it all goes back to my mother. I just sort of carry it with pride.”

Jacobs, a graduate of the Brighton pilot school Another Course to College, can also carry with pride the fact that he is a Boston High School Scholar. He says he felt relieved and fortunate when he learned he had received the scholarship. “I felt like the next four years of my life were set,” says Jacobs (CGS’14). “I won’t have to worry about juggling jobs and working off loans and debt.”

Back in his native Antigua, Jacobs had always been involved in community service and other activities, like the running club and a mentoring program. He arrived in the United States when he was in the fifth grade, moved back and forth a bit, and finally settled here during sophomore year.

Jacobs plans on becoming a physician, specializing in oncology. Cancer, he says, has plagued his family. His grandmother recently died of leukemia. But first, he’ll decide on a major, perhaps biology or chemistry, participate in intramural soccer, and try his hand at poetry or writing. “Anything else I will do just to try it,” he says. “You might as well.” CKB