

BU trustee's nonprofit aids diverse Boston-area families

FUELing College Saving

JUANA AGUIRRE GREW UP IN RURAL El Salvador with no formal schooling, and she came to the United States in search of a better life. After 23 years working for the same East Boston company, she makes just over \$14 an hour preparing meals for airline passengers. But she was determined to send her daughter, Stephanie Martinez, to college.

"She wants the best for me, for my future—she wants me to have a better life than she had," Martinez (SAR'18) says, sitting beside her mother in their apartment in Chelsea, Mass., a few weeks before starting her sophomore year. "She works hard to support both of us. She's very strong."

When Martinez was in ninth grade, Aguirre found the help they needed to reach that goal of college in the nonprofit FUEL Education (Families United for Educational Leadership).

BU trustee Robert Hildreth, founder and president of International Bank Services, founded FUEL in 2009 to help underserved Boston-area families whose members had never gone to college send their children on to higher education, making them the family's first generation to attend college. The program offers families a financial incentive, but it also requires a long-term commitment, a combination that Hildreth believes helps families stay on the path to college. This fall, there are about 250 students in college from FUEL families, 5 of them at BU, all Latino: 3 freshmen and one junior in addition to Martinez.

"FUEL seems to have come across

what we feel is the secret sauce, and that is that you focus on the parents before you focus on the kids," says Hildreth, FUEL's executive director.

The nonprofit offers parents a deal: if they'll start a modest college savings program and stick to it, FUEL will match the total when their student is ready to go off to college. There are minimums and maximums, which vary by community, but the amounts are modest, often less than \$2,000. Many FUEL students attend schools with lower price tags, such as Bunker Hill Community College and Salem State University.

For four years, Aguirre was able to save small amounts every month, even after paying all their bills and sending money home to family in El Salvador. Last year, when her daughter was ready to enter BU, her savings earned a \$1,500 match from FUEL.

"Her struggles meant a lot to me," says Martinez, who left Chelsea High School with a 4.0 GPA and a slew of advanced placement courses on her transcript. "I saw kids who didn't

really care about their grades and their parents worked hard as well—how can you do that to them?"

More important than the money is the parents' time, Hildreth says. "BU would love to double the diversity on campus. So would most colleges. But the students who can make it through to graduation aren't many. BU is involved in a fierce competition for qualified African American and Latino students with other colleges, all willing to give big scholarships to those who apply. Politicians and educators who want to help should work to harness the motivation of low-income parents into an engine to improve schools."

Aguirre attended mandatory monthly Saving Circle meetings to learn the ins and outs of the college application process and to talk about ways to keep her daughter motivated. The meetings included a meal and a chance to talk with other parents about problems they share. The Chelsea meetings were held in Spanish, a big help for her mother.

Families are recruited for FUEL



Stephanie Martinez (SAR'18) (left) credits her mother, Juana Aguirre, for making sure she got to college—and that they could pay for it.

This summer, the Yawkey Nonprofit Internship Program provided stipends for 14 BU students. The program pays a stipend of \$1,500 for an internship during the academic year and \$3,000 for a summer internship.



through the Chelsea and Lynn school districts, as well as individual schools and after-school programs in Boston and Lynn. They tend to be minority, immigrant families with first-generation American children, typically ninth graders just beginning to think about college.

“There’s a tremendous amount of literature which says the parents are the great keepers of motivation,” Hildreth says in his small FUEL office on Copley Square. “Yes, it happens that you get a favorite teacher in the seventh grade who changes your life. But it happens seldom compared to the motivation you get day in and day out from your parents.”

The relationship with FUEL is just one of the ways BU is trying “to make a real commitment to diversity,” Hildreth says, naming other programs like Upward Bound, College Advising Corps, and the Posse Foundation. “I see BU really trying to come up with innovative solutions.”

Hildreth started FUEL with his own money (and he continues to plug gaps when needed), but it has since brought in more than \$1 million from foundations, including the Boston Foundation, the Lloyd Balfour Foundation, and the Richard and Susan Smith Family Foundation.

FUEL students at BU are also eligible for the Century Challenge scholarships. Hildreth and his wife, Diane, contributed \$3 million to the program to establish the FUEL scholarship. Martinez, for example, has received \$10,000 a year through the challenge, as well as other financial aid, but still needed to take out loans to close the gap this year.

In her college admissions essay, Martinez wrote about the poverty she saw while visiting family in El Salvador and how it made her determined to use her education to help. At the College of Health & Rehabilitation Sciences: Sargent College, she is working toward a career in global public health.

“I have all these opportunities, and I have to take advantage of them,” she says, looking at her mother, “because she couldn’t do that.” JB

Yawkey Foundations Gift Goes to Work

THIS PAST SUMMER, BENJAMIN St. Laurent had planned to spend his days at an unpaid internship at a local nonprofit and his nights working part-time to pay his rent. Instead, the political science major was able to take a paying job and skip the night job entirely, thanks to the newly launched Yawkey Nonprofit Internship Program, which pays students to work for nonprofits that have no budget for interns. St. Laurent (CAS’17) worked at the nonprofit Environment Massachusetts.

“I think I went into the internship knowing about problems facing the environment, but I quickly was taught some of the solutions and spent my summer promoting them,” says St. Laurent, whose work for the advocacy group has influenced him to consider a minor in earth science. “I wrote a report highlighting some Massachusetts companies that are embracing ways to cut carbon emissions. The internship really made use of my political science major, because I got to go to the State House to attend hearings and meet the legislators.”

This summer, the Yawkey Nonprofit Internship Program provided stipends for 14 BU sophomores and juniors, all of whom were required to line up an internship with a nonprofit organization before applying. The program, which pays a stipend of \$1,500 for an internship during the academic year and \$3,000 for a summer internship, is funded by the Yawkey Foundations, which pledged \$10 million in September 2014.

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The late, longtime Boston Red Sox owners Tom and Jean Yawkey had a relationship with BU dating to the early 1950s, when BU played all its football games at Fenway Park, and Terrier quarterback and baseball star Harry Agganis (SED’54) signed with the Red Sox. Today, the Yawkey Foundations support improvements to health care, human services, and education.

Students in the inaugural group of Yawkey interns worked at organizations that include the International Institute of Minnesota, which works to resettle refugees as well as provide them with educational programs, and the Founders Clinic, which serves underserved populations in the Oregon City, Ore., area.

“We’ve been hearing really positive feedback from students and employers,” says Lauren Soares (CAS’13), the Yawkey Internship program coordinator at BU’s Center for Career Development. “I’ve had students tell me that they are now considering jobs in the nonprofit field, which is exciting for us.” AL ■