

## The Posse Foundation: A gang of scholars

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*Top row (left to right): Jose Capo, Cherise Comma, Michael Arroyo, Lennon Johnson III-Richardson, Dr. Carol R. Johnson (Superintendent, Boston Public Schools), Orlando Diaz, Maria A. Mosquera, Loan Nguyen, Raul E. Cruz, Nathaniel West, Carlos Guerra, Jamari Jones. Bottom row (left to right): Nigel Henry Robinson, Kamal Riley.*

Talk of a posse would have created serious concern in inner city Boston just a few years ago. But that has changed now. The Posse Foundation has brought a new sense of community pride.

The Foundation arranges for full tuition scholarships to six distinguished colleges for students who are selected in a very competitive process. In addition to the Boston area, posses are established in New York, Atlanta, Chicago, Washington, D.C., and Miami.

According to Deborah Bial, the President of the Foundation, selection is not based upon scores on an examination. “Nominated students go through three phase interviews, which we call a dynamic assessment process,” she says. “We are looking for students with leadership potential, concern for academic achievement and the motivation to do great things with their lives.”

The Posse Foundation staff is trained on how to evaluate students in the interview process. The first interview is with a large number of nominees. Those who are asked to come to a second interview then have the traditional one-on-one opportunity to impress the foundation.

Those called back for the third time will be interviewed by representatives from the recruiting colleges.

There are 37 participating colleges, but only Bucknell, Bryn Mawr, Centre, Denison, Hamilton and Union take students from the Boston area. Several local colleges are in the program but they only accept students from more remote locations. This helps with geographic diversity.

This year, the Posse had 12,000 nominees competing for 460 scholarships. Each school takes 10 to 15 students. The group going to each school is part of that posse.

This fall, for instance, two Boston area scholars will be part of Posse 6. They include Bucknell incoming freshmen Kamal Riley, a senior at Charlestown High, and Nigel Henry Robinson, a senior at John D. O'Bryant School of Math and Science.

The idea behind The Posse is relatively simple and recognizes that life on upscale university campuses is all too often a culture shock for students from low-income urban neighborhoods. Launched in 1989, the program started after a student who had dropped out reportedly said: "I wouldn't have left if my posse had been with me."

The program was developed to provide promising public high school students an opportunity for a quality college education. From the perspective of the collaborating colleges, the Posse Foundation provides an opportunity for them to bring on campus talented and highly motivated minority students. Over the years the colleges have awarded \$265 million in full tuition scholarships.

An equal number of men and women have received the awards, and 85 percent of the students have been minorities. And what is most important, the Posse concept of providing group support has been so effective that the graduation rate is 90 percent.

Bial couldn't be more excited. "We have moved beyond our concern for providing a college education for those who might otherwise be left out," the Posse president enthused. "I now see the Posse Foundation as a most unusual system of leadership development. We are consciously working to create a new leadership organization. By 2020 we will have 6,000 posse alumni."

It appears that Ms. Bial's optimism is realistic. About 45 percent of Posse alumni are now in graduate school or have already completed their advance degrees.

Qualified high school students who want to compete to join the Posse should ask their teachers or guidance councilors to recommend them.

## Meet a posse member: Michael Arroyo, Jr.

“Competing for the Posse scholarship was one of the most challenging experiences of my life,” asserted Michael Arroyo, Jr., a Metco student from Jamaica Plain at Wellesley High School. “There were about 300 kids competing in the first interview.”

Posse scholarships are for full tuition for four years. “I was really nervous,” Arroyo said. “but I was confident. I knew I had to maintain my composure.”

The students were divided into discussion groups of 10. “Everyone had an opportunity to lead the discussion,” Arroyo said. “We talked about critical issues like abortion, racism and health care.”

During the discussion, Posse staff members — or trainers — would observe and evaluate the performance of each member of the group.

“As a leader, I did not want to show bias,” Arroyo said. “I expressed my own opinion but respectfully.”

Only about half of the students were invited back for the second round.

“I was nervous waiting to see if I made the cut, but I made it,” Arroyo said. “The second interview was just me and the trainer. I had to bring my transcript and a resume of any awards and extracurricular activities.”

The second interview would determine whether the candidates get invited for a third time to meet with the college admissions officers.

“Fortunately I have always been on the honor roll and have received a Scholastic Achievement Award every year,” Arroyo said. “I have also been a student leader and was the representative of Wellesley High School to the National Youth Leadership Conference in Washington, D.C. last year, among numerous other activities.”

Michael was nominated for the award by Metco coordinator Deborah Ward. There were about 1,350 kids competing for 60 scholarships.

Michael received a four year tuition scholarship to Hamilton College in Clinton, NY.



*Michael Arroyo is surrounded by his family at the Posse Foundation Scholarship Awards Night. Left to right, his grandmother Maria Capeles, Arroyo, his father Michael Arroyo, Sr. and his mother Carmen.*