



The Chronicle

Union's first Posse Scholars reach a milestone

June 13, 2010

When Union's first class of Posse Scholars arrived in Schenectady in 2006, their mentor took them into the dark of night to see the bright lights of their futures.

"At midnight, we spread out blankets on the lawn in front of Schaffer Library," said Maggie Tongue, director of the Scholars Program and Office of Post-Graduate Fellowships. "I asked them to lie down, close their eyes and visualize their graduation in this very spot. I asked them to think about their parents, family and friends who would be there. I asked them to imagine walking across the stage in their caps and gowns with their Posse."

"This helped them focus on their goal, it created a mental image of this goal that they'd be reminded of every time they walked across the lawn for the next four years," she added. "It also reinforced that they belonged here and were part of Union from the very first day."

Those Posse Scholars will graduate in June, each one having grasped with both hands the chance given them by the Posse Foundation.

The Posse Foundation was established in 1989 and has sites in Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Washington D.C., and soon, Miami. It selects extraordinary young people with leadership potential who excel academically, but may be overlooked by the traditional college selection process.

This mission has been embraced by Posse's nearly 40 partner colleges and universities, each of which is helping transform the leadership landscape in the United States by diversifying their campuses and making their learning climates more welcoming to all students.

These institutions each award four-year, full-tuition leadership scholarships to groups of 10 students – or Posses – annually. Their five-year graduation rate, across all colleges, is an impressive 90 percent. Eight of Union's 10 original scholars will receive diplomas in June.



Union's Posse Scholars, with President and Mrs. Ainlay, at a reception with Deborah Bial, founder of Posse, front right.

Of the remaining two, one will graduate in 2011 and the other will be granted a degree from Suffolk University in Boston in May.

Students like Antonio Gutierrez '10 and Julia Mai Vu '10 attribute this success, in part, to the support network created by their posse and by their mentors.

Tongue has mentored Gutierrez, Vu and their Posse peers for the last four years. When they were freshmen and sophomores, she met weekly with the group and then bi-monthly with each student. And as they became upperclassmen, she was available whenever they needed her. Together, they've developed academic and professional skills, and cultivated deeper, more meaningful relationships.

And it's the relationships that have made Tongue proudest.

"It goes to the heart of the purpose of Posse," she said. "They maintain relationships with each other so they can all grow independently, knowing their friends will be there for them. The most touching moments have come in times when they supported each other."

"At the 'Half-Way Ceremony' at the end of their sophomore year, they wrote down reasons they thought each member of their Posse would succeed," Tongue added. "They told each other about the strengths others see in them, and that was a beautiful gift few people ever receive."

With the strength of their friends behind them, this graduating class of Posse Scholars is leaving a lasting imprint on Union. And so are those following in their footsteps. Every year since 2006, the College has admitted a new Posse.

"These students are chosen for their leadership abilities, their skills and motivation. As such, they've made positive changes in the way campus organizations they've joined are run," said Tongue. "The model of a group of students supporting each other socially and academically is used in many places at Union – Posse serves as an example of how to make the most of our learning environment."

Union's First Posse Scholars

Lisis I. Alvarez

Jamaica Plain, Mass.

Major: Sociology

Deanna A. Cox

Dorchester, Mass.

Major: Political Science, Latin American and Caribbean Studies

Antonio Gutierrez

Boston, Mass.

Major: Philosophy

Joshua A. Hernandez

Dorchester, Mass.

Major: Electrical engineering

Gregory K. Jean

Hyde Park, Mass.

Major: Interdepartmental history and political science

Kenrick L. Liu

Malden, Mass.

Major: Economics

Alexandria R. Nunez-Bibby

South Attleboro, Mass.

Major: Sociology

Sarim Proeung (transferred to Suffolk University)

Lowell, Mass.

Klenton Tomori

West Roxbury, Mass.

Major: Interdepartmental Spanish and science/medicine/technology

Julia Mai Vu

Boston, Mass.

Major: Interdepartmental Asian Studies and studio arts, pre-med