



The Chronicle

Deborah Bial, president of Posse Foundation, to speak at Founders Day

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Deborah Bial, founder and president of the Posse Foundation, which aims to increase student diversity at selective U.S. colleges, will deliver the keynote address at Founders Day Thursday, Feb. 25 at 12:45 p.m. in Memorial Chapel. The event commemorates the 215th anniversary of the granting of the College's charter by the state.

The Posse Foundation identifies and recruits urban public high school students who might otherwise be passed over by the traditional college-admissions process and sends them in multicultural teams - or posses - to top colleges and universities like Union, the University of Pennsylvania and Vanderbilt.

The nonprofit foundation was formed in 1989 after Bial, a former youth leadership program worker in New York City, heard a young student say, "I never would have dropped out of college if I had my posse with me."

More than 3,100 Posse Scholars have been awarded \$330 million in four-year, full-tuition merit scholarships from the organization's 37 partner institutions.



Since 2006, Union has partnered with the Boston branch of the Posse Foundation, which also has sites in Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami, New York and Washington, D.C. The College's first group of Posse Scholars will graduate in June.

In 2007, Bial was awarded a \$500,000 John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation fellowship. The "genius awards" are given to individuals who demonstrate "extraordinary originality and dedication" in their fields. The foundation described Bial as a person who is "addressing the challenges of college access for underrepresented populations by identifying and fostering latent talent and reframing college admissions into a more inclusive process."

"We're living in a society that's changing demographically very quickly, yet you look at the most selective colleges, and you don't see the diversity of the United States reflected in the student body," Bial said in an interview after receiving the award.

“If that doesn’t change, we’re going to continue to graduate a very homogeneous group, and the leadership of the United States will continue to be homogeneous. We think we have a chance to change that.”

A 1987 graduate of Brandeis University, Bial received her master’s and Ph.D. from Harvard University’s Graduate School of Education. She is also a founding partner of the consulting company Firefly Education LLC.

Also at Founders Day, Elizabeth Bossong, a Spanish teacher at Vestal Senior High School in Vestal, N.Y., will receive the Gideon Hawley Teacher Recognition Award. Bossong was nominated by Misty Shah ’12. The award is named for the 1809 graduate of Union who was New York state’s first superintendent of public education.

Past speakers at Founders Day have included Pulitzer Prize-winning author James M. McPherson; Paul LeClerc, president and chief executive officer of the New York Public Library and a former professor at Union; and Ira M. Rutkow ’70, a surgeon and author whose writing has focused on the history of American medicine.