



The UCA Martyrs Scholarship Program

Newsletter No. 1 El Salvador, C.A.



Dean Brackley, S.J., founder of the UCA Martyrs Scholarship Program, and the 2010 class of scholarship recipients.

"I was number one in my graduating class, but even my teachers knew that with my family's financial situation, I could never afford to go to college",
Milagro Chue,
Second Year Accounting Major
from Izalco, Sonsonate.

"Never in my dreams did I think I could study at the UCA. My grandmother raised me, it's just the two of us, and we really didn't have the money for me to go school here",
Marina Garcia Rivera,
Third Year Accounting Major
from Soyapango, San Salvador.

"When I joined the pre-admission program, I traveled each Saturday six hours on five different buses to be tutored in math and language. It was a sacrifice, but it was worth it for a chance at going to college."
Nilcer Melgar,
First Year Communications Major
from Guarjila, Chalatenango.

"At the UCA you learn that being a successful professional doesn't mean getting a great job and making lots of money, it means becoming better people, helping our communities, and doing something to improve our country."
Beatriz Garcia Zavala,
Third Year Business
Administration Major
from Soyapango, Salvador.

A dream come true

"People are always surprised when we tell them we are from Soyapango and study at the UCA, its hard for them to believe that students from such a poor community can be at such a prestigious university," explained Beatriz Garcia Zavala and Marina Garcia Rivera, 3rd year business majors with bright smiles and infectious enthusiasm, who grew up in one of San Salvador's most notorious neighborhoods, known for its high rates of murders and gang violence.

"Never in my dreams did I think I could study at the UCA. My grandmother raised me, it's just the two of us. We really didn't have the money for me to go school here" said Marina.

Beatriz, who grew up with her single mother, sister, and her sister's young children, agreed, "I was sure my only chance at college was the national university," referring to San Salvador's only public university, whose students see their studies constantly interrupted by student strikes and lack of resources. Had the girls studied there, they both say that their college education would have been radically different, "The UCA has given us so much support, academically, spiritually, and emotionally.

Plus, at the UCA you learn that being a successful professional doesn't mean getting a great job and making lots of money, it means becoming better people, helping our communities, and doing

something to improve our country," explained Beatriz.

For both Beatriz and Marina, the opportunity to study at the UCA is hard to put into words, "There aren't enough words to express the happiness and gratefulness I feel for this scholarship," expressed Marina.

As they think about graduating in two years, Marina aims to obtain a Masters degree in finance. Beatriz dreams of one day starting her own company, focused on commercial sales. Both young women aspire to help their families financially and but also help others, they explained, "we want to help fundraise for the UCA Martyrs Scholarships, so that more young people from Soyapango can study at the UCA and have the opportunity we've had to transform our lives."

Support a Student

Please help us transform El Salvador's future. When you support the UCA Martyrs Scholarship Program, you help young people receive a college education that will change their lives, their families and their communities for the better.

Currently, fifty students are participating in the program; a total of 224 have participated since 2004. Our hope is that, in the near future, we will be able to support 100 students annually, and thus help more young people to become professionals.

Presently the program is in urgent need of help, due to a sharp drop in donations during the current economic crisis; but the need for scholarships is greater every year.

Your donation will go directly to pay for the students' tuition and living expenses. A donation of any size helps.

Send your donation to:

Centro Mons. Romero
VIP SAL No. 568
P.O. Box 025364
Miami, FL 33102-5364
Make your check payable to
"Asociación Centro Monseñor Romero"

If you wish your gift to be tax-deductible, please make your check payable to:

The Jesuits of the Missouri Province
4511 West Pine Boulevard
St. Louis, MO 63108,
Please specify that the gift is for the UCA
Scholarship Fund.
Federal tax ID number is 43-0416129.



Beatriz Carolina Garcia Zavala,
Business Administration Major
from Soyapango.
20 years old.

Marina Dolores Garcia Rivera,
Accounting Major
from Soyapango.
20 years old.

Blessed with a scholarship

Milagro Chue, Accounting Major from Izalco, Sonsonate. 23 years old.

Wearing Converse sneakers, jeans, and a purple t-shirt, Milagro Chue looks like any other UCA student. Yet, if it weren't for the UCA Martyrs Scholarship Program, Milagro is sure she would have never set foot on the university.

"I was number one in my graduating class, but even my teachers knew that with my family's financial situation, I could never afford to go to college."

Although Milagro was already working parttime as an accounting clerk during high school to help her family, she doubts that even with a job she could have attended any university at all.

She explains, "working and going to schools is so hard, because your family always has financial needs and sometimes that makes it impossible to have the money to pay for tuition or books."

Now in her second year, Milagro is not only attending the UCA, she is thriving. With a big smile and a glimmer in her eyes she explains, "I'm doing well in my classes, and after graduating, I'd like to get

"After graduating, I'd like to get some work experience and then start my own consulting company. Eventually I'd like to run my own accounting firm"

some work experience and then start my own consulting company.

Eventually I'd like to run my own accounting firm. I want to employ people and help them, because, honestly, I never imagined I could study at a university like this, the best university in all of El Salvador.

I guess I limited myself because I knew my parents couldn't afford to help me go to college.

My scholarship has been the big blessing in my entire life. It's helping me reach my full potential and I want to help others do the same."



Dean Brackley S.J. and a group of scholarship students at the UCA.

"This scholarship has been the big blessing in my entire life. It's helping me reach my full potential and I want to help other people do the same"

"I was number one in my graduating class, but even my teachers knew that with my family's financial situation, I could never afford to go to college"

The chance at a career



Nilcer Gricelda Melgar, Communications Major from Guarjila, Chalatenango, 23 years old.

In 2006, when Nilcer finished high school in her small town of Guarjila, Chalatenango, one of El Salvador's poorest departments, going to college was simply not an option. "All my friends and teachers would tell me that I was such a good student and that I should keep studying, but my family had already told me they couldn't afford for me to college, we are nine brothers and sisters and my parents just didn't have the resources to help me."

Instead of pursuing her dream of a college education, Nilcer took a four month cosmetology course and begin working in a local beauty shop cutting hair. Nilcer, a soft-spoken and reserved young woman with dark brown eyes and light brown hair, was still working at the beauty shop four years later when a friend told her about the UCA Martyrs Scholarship Program. Although the opportunity Scholarship Program. Although the

opportunity to attend college seemed more and more unlikely with each passing year, Nilcer had not given up on her dream. When she heard of the scholarship program, she jumped at the chance to take the first of many tests in the rigorous selection process.

Nilcer passed the exam, and began traveling six hours on five different buses every Saturday to attend the pre-admission prep course that would give her a chance at the scholarship. The course is last from April to November, every Saturday from 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and focuses on Math, Writing, and Grammar.

Each year, only half of the students pass the demanding course and are allowed to take the entrance exam to the UCA. If they pass the entrance exam, then there is another preadmission class they must pass that the university requires all incoming first year students. All in all, it was after a year of exams and preparation classes that Nilcer was finally admitted to the UCA and granted her scholarship. Now, four months into her first semester at college, Nilcer has finally achieved the goal she thought was out of her reach, "I always aspired to be a college graduate. Working in the beauty shop, I had a trade but I didn't have a career. I want to learn more about the world and prepare myself to lead a successful life. That's what I've always wanted for myself and that's what I'm on my way to achieving, thanks to the UCA Martyrs Scholarship Program.

Our Students

The UCA Martyrs Scholarship Program transforms the lives of intelligent, hard-working and committed young people from extremely poor, rural or urban communities by providing them with the opportunity to be a college graduate and the next generation of El Salvador's leaders.

We rely on credible references from churches, religious communities and social organizations (we do not discriminate according to religion). They recommend candidates who fulfill the three basic criteria of economic need, academic ability and good character.

How did you find out about the UCA Martyrs Scholarship Fund?

When my brothers and I were young, our father was killed during the war. My mom was left alone to support us. When I graduated from high school, we couldn't afford to help me pay for college, so I had two choices: immigrate illegally to the U.S., or stay at home and work the land. My mother didn't want me to immigrate illegally, so I decided to stay in my rural town and try farming. Just when I was making this decision, a nun told me about the scholarship program, and I jumped at the chance.

What was the application process like?

For three months, I traveled every Saturday, over 4 hours each way to attend the required tutoring sessions. When I was awarded the scholarship, I knew it would change my entire life.

What would you say were the greatest challenges you faced at the UCA?

Studying at the UCA wasn't easy at times. It was hard for me to get accustomed to life in city after spending my whole life in a very rural community. Also, I finished high school as part of alternative program because I worked to support my family, so I was nervous that my high school program hadn't prepared me to study at a rigorous university like the UCA. But, I did well. I loved how my professors challenged me and I was able to see just how much I could accomplish. Gonzalo Bonilla is a math teacher in the mountains of Morazan, in the northeast of El Salvador.

What has this scholarship meant to you?

For many students like me, this scholarship program is a dream come true. It has changed my life in every way. When my father was killed, my brothers had to leave school to support my family. So, they never had the chance to finish high school. The scholarship has



From Scholarship Student to Committed Teacher

How one alumni gives back to his community, the story of Gonzalo Bonilla

Gonzalo Bonilla is a math teacher in the mountains of Morazan, in the northeast of El Salvador.

given me a career and now I can help my mom and my brothers who worked so hard to provide for me. And in my village, I'm now a role model for younger kids in my community. They come to my house for tutoring and it makes me happy that I can motivate them to keep studying.

You now teach math at a high school near your hometown, what do you enjoy about being a teacher?

Math is always one of the hardest subjects for students. Sometimes students don't understand a specific concept, but I love the challenge of trying to address student's diverse learning styles and getting them to analyze and think critically about problem solving. I also love advising students and mentoring them towards a better life. For example, I've started several after-school clubs for our students to help them develop life-skills. About 20 students participate in an art club, where I teach drawing and painting and we paint murals in our schools and in the community.

I've also started a guitar club with 8 students, and there are 31 students that belong to the environmental awareness club, which does community clean up and planting campaigns. Finally, I'm the advisor to a school garden project focused on teaching young people good nutrition and how to grow vegetables at home for their families.

What message do you have to others about the UCA Martyrs Scholarship Program?

I really want to encourage folks to support the scholarship program. At the high school where I teach, there are so many bright kids who, when they finish high school, have no chance to go to college simply because their families can't afford to help them. Many of them end up immigrating to the U.S., even though they would have preferred to stay in El Salvador and study. It's very sad because these young people are so talented, and they don't get the chance to go to college and have a better life simply because they're poor.



Universidad Centroamericana
“José Simeón Cañas”

*“The world will change only if there
are new human beings to change
it, people who are free to love,
to resist the lure of wealth,
and to stand with the
poor”.*

Dean Brackley, S.J.

The UCA Martyrs Scholarship Program

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