



Big Grant Announced for First-Generation College Students

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By First Coast News Staff

TALLAHASSEE, FL -- Franco Esparza is a freshman international business and marketing major at Florida State University.

"I'd like to be part of an organization that helps out the poverty that's striking in Latin America," he said.

Dana Ford is a junior at FSU and hopes to become a judge someday.

He's also the eighth of 13 children and was raised by a single father.

Both are first-generation college students, and they're getting a big boost from a new college fund.

"You see, it's the hope and promise of these first-generation college students - both for themselves and for their entire families - that is the core and essence of what the Helios Education Foundation is about," said foundation President Paul Luna.

The foundation's leaders announced a donation of \$10 million first-generation college students at the State Capitol Wednesday.

They say it's the largest private donation of its kind towards higher education.

Students like Ford and Esparza say the money means more than just getting a degree.

"I'm doing something not only for me but the community," Esparza said, "and to recognize where I come from means a lot to me."

Ford agrees.

"This gave me an opportunity to further my education to become the attorney, to become the judge and to become the teacher," Ford said.

St. Petersburg Times

Grant helps first-in-family college students A foundation gives a \$10 -million boost to a program for bright but needy Florida scholars.

SHANNON COLAVECCHIO-VAN SICKLER

St. Petersburg Times Staff Writer

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TALLAHASSEE - Colombia native Vanessa Marin almost turned down her acceptance to the University of South Florida this fall because her single mother, a custodian for Hillsborough County schools, couldn't afford the expense.

But a new Florida scholarship program for first-generation college students ensured that Marin, who graduated from Jefferson High School in Tampa with a 4.9 grade point average, could afford to attend. Today Marin, an 18-year-old aspiring architect, is wrapping up her first semester at USF.

Wednesday, an Arizona foundation with plans for a Tampa office donated \$10-million toward the program, ensuring that thousands more Florida students like Marin will get the financial help they need to realize their college dreams.

The Helios Education Foundation donated two \$5-million endowments: one for Florida's 28 community colleges and another for the 11 state universities.

The institutions will use annual earnings from the endowments to boost the private donations they gather each year for the state's First-Generation Matching Grant program. Lawmakers established the program last year to help bright students who might not otherwise be able to afford a community college or university.

Under the program, the state matches dollar for dollar what universities and community colleges raise privately for scholarships that go to first-generation students. Lawmakers set aside \$6.5-million in matching dollars for universities and \$5-million for the community colleges.

USF, for example, can get up to \$967,000 matched by the state.

Helios chief executive officer Vince Roig and president Paul Luna were the first in their families to attend college, and they see their donation - the first Helios has made in Florida - as a way to give others the same opportunities.

"We are hopeful that this will break down some of the barriers and challenges that we all experienced in the past and will ensure more success for these students," Luna said. "There's truly an opportunity here to fulfill dreams for those first-generation students."

The First Generation program does not specify race, but lawmakers passed it in hopes of getting more low-income minorities into Florida's higher education institutions.

Mark Rosenberg, chancellor of the state universities, estimates the Helios endowments will provide half a million dollars a year in total to the universities and community colleges.

He said he will ask the Legislature to continue or expand the state's funding of the matching grants, so that more students can benefit from them in the years to come.

The program is helping 4,846 students in the state universities this year, including more than 100 at USF.

Marin receives Florida's Bright Futures merit scholarship program, which covers tuition. But the \$800 she gets each semester from First Generation covers other school expenses.

"All my family is really proud of me, especially my mom," Marin said. "Especially because she's a single mother. She didn't know if I would ever get here."

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Tallahassee Democrat

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Big gift going to state grants

Foundation gives \$10 million to First Generation program

By Diane Hirth
TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT SENIOR WRITER

Dana Ford and Franco Esparza, Florida State University students and first in their families to go to college, already benefit from Florida's new First Generation Matching Grant program.

On Wednesday, the Helios Education Foundation announced a \$10 million gift to help Florida universities and community colleges provide more of these grants. Two executives of the private, Phoenix-based foundation, Paula Luna and Vince Roig, mentioned they too were the first in their families to make it to college.

Grant amounts vary, with universities deciding how to distribute their share of the money, but the low-income recipients generally have been able to lessen their debts and work schedules.

Ford, who's from a family of 13 children, said, "It's a wonderful opportunity. I'm blessed to have it." With the grant, this junior from Hobe Sound doesn't have to work and can concentrate on political science and criminology studies, with an eye to a law-school future.

"I believe this grant has leveled the playing field," said Esparza, born in Peru and an international business major from Sunrise. He said the grant erased the need for him to get a student loan.

This fall, FSU awarded nearly 700 first-generation grants of up to \$3,000 a year, with the amount based on need. FAMU distributed grants of \$500 to 1,247 students.

The 2006 Legislature, upon Gov. Jeb Bush's urging, provided \$6.5 million for this new program. About 5,000 students received the grants, with the condition that state money had to be matched dollar for dollar by private gifts by the schools.

In the upcoming legislative session, "I pledge to you this will be a high priority in my budget," Rep. Joe Pickens, R-Palatka, chairman of the House Schools and Learning Council, said Wednesday.

The Florida Board of Governors, which oversees the university system, is asking for an additional \$13 million in 2007-08 for the first-generation program and a revised formula of \$1 private match per \$3 of state funding.

While it's quickly become a popular program, "the only problem is to get more dollars for it, because the economy is getting tougher," said Sen. Al Lawson, D-Tallahassee, a sponsor of the legislation creating first-generation college grants.

This fall, FSU awarded nearly 700 first-generation grants of up to \$3,000 a year. FAMU distributed grants of \$500 to 1,247 students.

Contact senior writer Diane Hirth at (850) 671-6546 or dhirth@tallahassee.com

Bonita Daily News

(and other E.W. Scripps newspapers)

Foundation creates \$10M college endowment for first-generation students

By Jennifer Brannock
Staff writer

It's tough to be a pioneer.

No one in your family can give you advice, because they don't know what it's like. None of your friends have been in your shoes.

Your college campus is packed with legacies. The most you can hope for is to start one.

That's life for students who are the first in their families to attend college. The journey they are on is a bumpy expedition that will hopefully lead them to discover themselves.

The Helios Education Foundation wants to be their compass.

The Arizona-based foundation announced Wednesday it will donate a total of \$10 million for an endowment to be distributed among all 11 Florida state universities, including Florida Gulf Coast University, and 28 community colleges, including Edison College.

When combined with state matching funds, the donation will create the largest public-private source of scholarship funding for first-generation students in state history.

The grant is the foundation's first gift in Florida.

"A number of us, including ... myself were first-generation college students, so we all sort of have our stories of what's it's like to be that first generation to break the barriers of higher education within the family," said Paul Luna, president of Helios.

"We know how meaningful and challenging it was, at times, to be the first."

The Board of Governors Foundation will receive \$5 million to be distributed among state universities. The Foundation for Florida's Community Colleges will distribute the remaining \$5 million among community colleges.

Trustees will distribute annual funding to schools somewhat evenly, but also based on their financial needs and size. Community colleges will begin receiving funds in the spring, and state universities in the fall.

It has not yet been determined how much money each school will get.

The grant will be an addition to existing state money for first-generation students.

Last year, the Florida Legislature allocated \$6.5 million for state universities and \$5 million for community colleges. Recipient schools were required to match the funding they received from the state.

FGCU received \$143,604 this year, which they matched.

Revenues from the Helios endowment can be used by the colleges to help them match more state funding.

As of Oct. 5, 317 FGCU students have received first-generation grants. The scholarship amounts typically range from \$250 to \$1,000 per year.

“We’re very positive this will help many thousands of students over the coming years to have access to post-secondary higher education, but also success as students,” said David Armstrong, chancellor of the Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Education.

Research has shown first-generation students struggle with finances for higher education more often than not. That acknowledgment has prompted national attention for the students.

“The national trend in higher ed is to find resources for first generation students,” said Mark Rosenberg, chancellor of the State University System of Florida.

“There’s a recognition throughout the country that while public education should be accessible to all, that the rising costs are putting up barriers.”

Students like Dana Ford, a junior at Florida State University, know all about the strain college can be on a family. The first-generation scholarship recipient, from Hobe Sound, is the eighth of 13 children.

“The scholarship has really allowed me to further my education,” Ford said. “It has inspired me to give back to others in my community.

“It really has allowed me to step through the windows of my mind and focus on my career.”

Sun-Sentinel  com
Scholarships available if you're the first in your family to go to college

By Scott Travis
South Florida Sun-Sentinel

Florida's colleges and universities got a \$10 million boost to help students become the first in their families to attend college.

The Phoenix-based Helios Education Foundation announced Wednesday it would give \$5 million to the state's community college system and \$5 million to the state university system to help pay for scholarships for first-generation college students. The money will go into an endowment, which is expected to generate \$500,000 per year.

That money, as well as funding from the Legislature this spring, will be distributed to universities. They can use the money to provide full or partial-scholarships to students.

The state began the program this school year with an \$11.5 million allocation from the Legislature, which in addition to matching funds from colleges and universities, paid for 4,846 scholarships. Education officials do not know how many new students could benefit from the Helios grant. Universities will decide whether they want to give full scholarships to a few students, partial scholarships to many, or a combination of both.

"Through these scholarships, first-generation students will have the chance to further their education, make college a reality and blaze a trail for others in their families," Helios President Paul Luna said.

Franco Esparza, who graduated from Cypress Bay High School in Weston this year, moved to Florida from Peru when he was 3. He received other scholarships and student loans to attend Florida State University, but still came up \$1,200 a semester short. Then he received a \$1,500 first-generation scholarship.

"I was about to take out a private loan with a bank, which would have had a high interest rate, or get a job," he said. "That \$1,500 helped me out a lot."

The Legislature created the program as a way to increase minority enrollment in colleges and universities. Since 2000, the state has prohibited schools from specifically using race as a factor in admissions.

"You can't really go out and designate a certain number of students from a minority group to receive a scholarship," said Michael Armstrong, associate provost for academic affairs at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton. "But there is a large overlap between those students in minority groups and those students who are the first in their families to attend college."

Officials at FAU say the scholarships helped preserve diversity at their school, even as admissions requirements went up. The school passed a policy for this year's incoming freshmen prohibiting entry to any student who needed remedial classes. Those students were disproportionately black. But the scholarships have made college attainable for many students who are academically ready but financially needy, officials said.

FAU provided 401 scholarships last year, while Florida International University west of Miami provided 1,388, the most in the state.

Students interested in applying for the scholarships should check with the financial aid office of their college or university of choice.

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Gainesville Sun

Group gives \$10M for scholarships

By JACK STRIPLING

Sun staff writer

A private foundation is giving \$10 million to a scholarship program for first-generation college students that University of Florida President Bernie Machen helped persuade the state to institute this year.

The Helios Education Foundation, a nonprofit group dedicated to education initiatives, will spread the scholarship money evenly across the state's 11 public universities and 28 community colleges. The funds will be endowed, which Helios officials say will provide about \$500,000 each year in perpetuity.

"This is the holiday season, and there couldn't be a better gift for our students who need more access to higher education," said Mark Rosenberg, chancellor of the State University System.

The state Legislature provided \$6.5 million in recurring matching money this year for scholarships that go toward students who come from families with an income of less than \$40,000 and are the first in their families to go to college.

Gov. Jeb Bush endorsed the idea after Machen proposed a similar plan at UF called the Florida Opportunity Scholarship Program.

This year, UF gave scholarships to 438 first-generation students with the help of the state's matching gifts. The scholarships are billed as a method of increasing both the economic and ethnic diversity of the university. Of the 438 students given scholarships at UF this year, 178 were black.

The Helios gift will give universities and community colleges money that will be counted as private donations eligible for state matches.

Paul Luna, president of Helios, was also a first-generation college student.

In a conference call with reporters Wednesday, Luna said first-generation students face challenges navigating the higher education system because they can't rely upon the experiences of their parents.

"This (money) will break down some of the barriers and challenges that we all experienced in the past," Luna said.

Headquartered in Arizona, Helios is a nonprofit corporation that funds initiatives in Florida and Arizona. The organization concentrates on grants in programs that affect grades 7 through 12, early childhood education and post-secondary education.

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PalmBeachPost.com |

\$10 million to help first-time students

By [Kimberly Miller](#)

Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

An Arizona-based education foundation gave \$10 million Thursday to create endowments for Florida students who are the first in their family to attend college.

The donation from the Helios Education Foundation, which will open a Tampa office next year, will provide \$500,000 a year in perpetuity to match state money set aside this spring for first-generation college students.

About 4,850 university students are receiving tuition grants through the program, which dedicated \$6.5 million in state money for university students.

Another \$5 million was set aside for community colleges.

But for some schools, coming up with the matching dollars can be difficult. The endowment will ease that money-raising effort.

"FAU does not have the financial resources of some of the larger universities and this will really help us put those matches together," said Florida Atlantic University President Frank Brogan, who was the first in his family to attend college.

Four hundred FAU students are receiving the grant this year.

The legislation was approved as a way to increase minority enrollment in the state's colleges and universities, although students of all races are eligible for the money as long as they are the first in their family to go to college.

The endowments - \$5 million to universities, \$5 million to community colleges - aim to keep the grants flowing for students in the second, third, and fourth years of the program.

The money will be dispersed through the Board of Governors Foundation and the Foundation for Florida's Community Colleges.

"Through these scholarships, first-generation students will have the chance to further their education, make college a reality and blaze a trail for others in their families," Helios President Paul Luna said.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS Foundation donates \$10M for undergrad scholarships

TALLAHASSEE - A private foundation donated \$10 million Wednesday to create scholarships for Florida college and university students whose parents do not have four-year degrees.

The gifts - \$5 million each for state universities and community colleges - from the Helios Education Foundation will be matched by the state largely with dollars from the new First Generation Matching Grant Program the state Legislature created this year.

While any student can apply for first generation scholarships, lawmakers hope they will increase minority enrollment after it declined last year in the state's 11 public universities.