



Photo by Theresa Danna-Douglas

Students forge new futures with help from University program

Sophomore Manuel Ortiz should not be attending classes at the University of Nevada, Reno, let alone have graduated from high school— if you believe statistics. Yet, he is just one of more than 100 students in the Dean’s Future Scholars program who have succeeded in making it to college when odds were against them.

“A lot of why I’m here is due to the program,” Ortiz, 20, who graduated from Procter R. Hug High School in 2007, says. “Although I’d like to believe that I could be here anyway, it would have been a lot tougher. Before the program, in middle school, I wasn’t really thinking about college; then they came to me and asked if I wanted to go.”

The Dean’s Future Scholars Program, for students from low-income families, is offered through the University’s College of Education. It lights the way for students who have

no example to follow, since another requirement of the program is that selected students are the first generation of their families to go to college.

“The program really leads us in the right direction, you can’t get away with anything,” Ortiz says. “With its mentoring, the program is very hands-on. Step-by-step they helped me, made sure I was on the right track, made sure I was keeping up with my homework, studying for placement tests, and keeping up with paperwork and applications.”

The Dean’s Future Scholars program now includes 20 additional students from Sparks High School, following a \$200,000 financial boost from an AT&T Aspire grant.

“This will help us expand our commitment to prepare students for college and ultimately the workforce,” Bill Sparkman, dean of the College of Education, says. These 20 freshmen at Sparks High School are now on track to be the first generation in their families

Brothers Manuel Ortiz, Class of 2011; Alfonso Miranda, Class of 2013, and Eddie Ortiz, Class of 2014, who are actively involved in the Dean’s Future Scholars program, pose on the Hug High School campus.

to attend college, a reality for those who may have never even dreamed it before.

Ortiz shared the podium with Sparkman, Nevada State Sen. Bill Raggio and other program supporters at the ceremony Oct. 16 to announce the AT&T grant at the College of Education plaza.

“There were tough times and good times,” Ortiz told the audience. “With the mentors checking in with me every week, they helped me through it. Having this experience made it more comfortable to come here as a student.” He is now pursuing a degree in secondary education

to become a history teacher.

Ortiz acknowledges the ongoing influence of the Dean’s Future Scholars Program.

“Although I’d like to believe that I could be here anyway, it would have been a lot tougher. Before the program, in middle school, I wasn’t really thinking about college; then they came to me and asked if I wanted to go.”

Manuel Ortiz, Class of 2011

Student Success

The Dean's Future Scholars Program includes all of the components recommended by research to help students reach their goals of graduating high school and attending college, including:

- Frequent mentoring with trained peers
- Involving parents and family
- Math acceleration
- 11th- and 12th-graders taking college courses in summer as a bridge between high school and college
- Work and involvement on campus with groups and activities

"This program impacts your family," he says. His older sister, Justina Ortiz, 21, is also a graduate of the Dean's Future Scholars program and is attending Truckee Meadows Community College pursuing a nursing degree. His two younger brothers, Alfonso Miranda, 17, and Eddie Ortiz, 16, a senior and a junior at Hug High School, respectively, are in the Dean's Future Scholar program, and looking forward to college and careers. Alfonso wants to pursue criminal justice studies and become a police officer, while Eddie is thinking about becoming an optometrist.

And their mother is always involved in what they do, Manuel says. "She always tells us do our best and don't quit. One of the best things was learning good study habits through the program, like do your homework right away. You learn the value of making it a priority, instead of just watching TV."

"It's nice to know my brothers are on the right track. This has expanded my social life, enlarged my world," Ortiz says.

Ortiz also mentors 17 seventh- and eighth-grade students of the 300 students from throughout Washoe County School District who participate in the Dean's Future Scholars Program. Nine other University students who were future scholars are also mentoring high school students working their way to college.

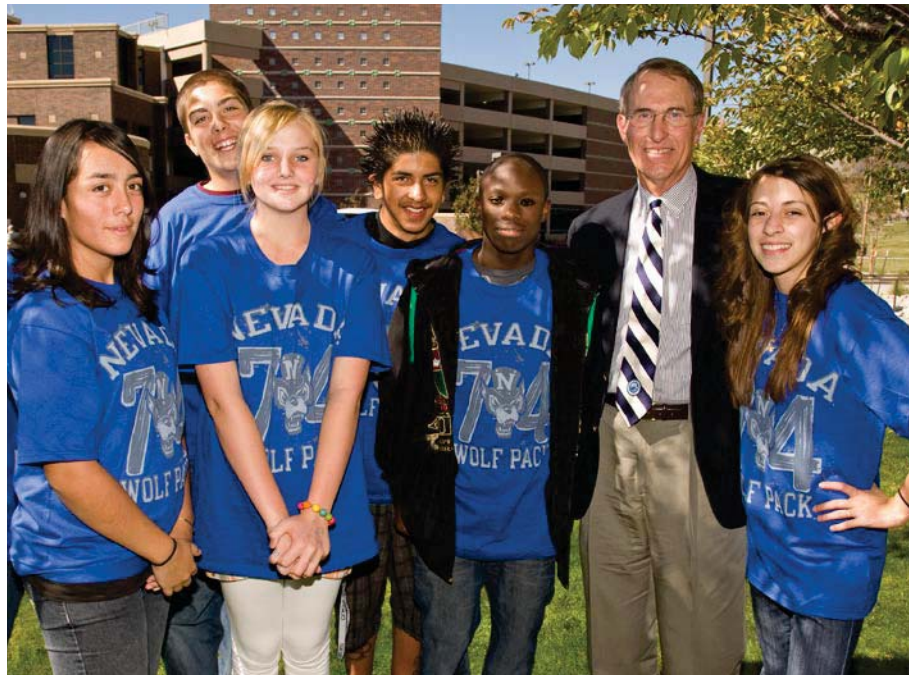


Photo by Theresa Danna-Douglas

College of Education Dean William Sparkman with high school students participating in the Dean's Future Scholars program

Through the program, University students are trained to help middle and high school students persist through adversity, learn study skills, and prepare for and apply to college. These University mentors visit the schools and students weekly, a greater frequency than in most mentor programs.

"The Dean's Future Scholars program began with a simple idea: before middle and high school students can consider teaching as a career, they must first believe that college is a possibility," Sparkman, who founded the program in 2000, says. "With this gift from AT&T, more of these young people will set the goal of a college education, and they will have incredible help along the way."

Of the first 164 students in the program, 68 percent (112) have graduated from high school. And with the help of GEAR-UP grants of \$10,000, 101 are in college, most at the University.

"The program has been an extraordinary success and demonstrates the impact that intensive support and resources can have," Sparkman says. "We expect a strong rate of

return. This grant from AT&T will help us expand our commitment to prepare students for college, and ultimately the workforce."

Nationwide, nearly one-third of high school students drop out before graduating. In Washoe County schools, which rank 50th in the country for graduation, the graduation rate is 55 percent. It is lower at schools designated as "at risk."

"These kids need someone to guide them," Bob Edgington, Dean's Future Scholars director, says of participants. "They're talented kids, but without someone to guide them, their chance of going to college would be pretty slim." ■

Major funding for the program and its elements has come from the University of Nevada, Reno Regents Award Program, USA Funds, Nevadaworks, City of Reno, GEAR-UP, Nevada Public Education; an endowment from Phil and Jennifer Satre '80M.Ed.; and an endowment from Robert and Barbara Thimot.

—Mike Wolterbeek '02