

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



## Posse reaches a milestone

### 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

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 Posse—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. Of the remaining two, one will graduate in 2011

and the other was to receive 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."

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## BY JULIA MAI VU

Class of 2010

Boston, Mass.

Majors: Pre-med, interdepartmental Asian Studies and studio fine arts

Even though we see each other around campus almost daily, we greet each other like old friends—with big smiles, playful jabs and laughter—because that’s just what we are. My Posse and I are close. But it’s more than that; it’s that we’ve kind of grown up together. At least in the sense that we all became Posse Scholars, studying, discovering and maturing together on this Union journey.

For 10 months after I became a Posse Scholar, during my senior year at Boston Latin School, I met with Posse staff and the nine other Union-bound scholars every week. We learned leadership, and time management, team-building and communication skills. Learning these things isn’t unique, I guess, but the way we all learned them together is. It’s what makes the Posse program so different and exciting. Being part of a Posse has been really important to my college experience, and it’s helped me tremendously here at Union.

At the beginning, as a freshman, it allowed me to transition more easily from the comforts of my home in Boston, Mass. to being on my own in Schenectady. Having friends who were coming to Union with me made the new, more independent lifestyle of college less intimidating. My Posse is truly my support network on campus. They’re always there whenever I’m stressed, need advice or just need someone to talk to.

And my Posse has given me greater confidence too. Because I had to get to know nine strangers, through constant interaction and engagement, any shyness I might feel hasn’t held me back. I’m an active member of Biology Club. I’ve shown class work in “The Illuminated Pixel” art exhibit on campus and this fall I shadowed Dr. Richard Simmons ’99 of Schenectady Neurology Consultants.

Dr. Simmons showed me how a pediatric neurology office runs, and when we weren’t focused on patient-related responsibilities, he’d open a textbook and say, “Here’s the brain, this is how this part or that part functions.” I even learned about Botox, which has uses beyond what everyone thinks it’s for. Botox actually helps relax muscles so that people can begin to use them with greater ease again, so it has much more important applications than wrinkle-reduction.

I also gave a public presentation at the annual Steinmetz Symposium last spring on “Attitudes and Preferences of Vietnamese People toward Folklore and Scientific Medicine.” I was really proud of myself. I stood up and spoke with confidence, showing my presentation and leadership skills, and passing on what I know. It was a great opportunity, and I hope people learned something about medicine and medical care in Vietnam. I know I did. Conducting the interviews and research for this project in my



*Dr. Richard Simmons '99 goes over images of a patient's brain with Julia Vu '10 at his practice, Schenectady Neurological Consultants. Julia shadowed Dr. Simmons during fall 2009.*

hometown was amazing.

I went to Vietnam on a term abroad during fall of my junior year. It was only the second time I’d been back since I left when I was five years old. But I wasn’t worried or anxious about traveling there with 15 students virtually unknown to me—my Posse had already taught me to be open-minded and receptive to unfamiliar people.

In my Posse, we’re all from different cultural backgrounds with different personalities, and we don’t always agree on everything. Yet, we’ve learned from each other how to respect divergent opinions and

challenge ideas rather than people. This was very valuable to me while I was in Vietnam, living several months with strangers who would become friends. We were always able to compromise and work out any unexpected problems.

Vietnam was extremely revealing in other ways too. What I saw there reinforced my desire to be a primary care physician who provides healthcare to underprivileged people. In Vietnam, I witnessed the intense lack of healthcare many people—and even my relatives—have. My uncle is disabled due to inadequate treatment he received years ago. Poor people in Vietnam often have to resort to cheaper services, which do not usually cure their illnesses, and only provide temporary relief so they can work the next day. I empathized with them because my family was in a similar situation when we lived in Vietnam.

Becoming a doctor will take years of grueling effort, which is just now beginning as I study for the MCAT. But I know my dedication to healing people, my Posse experiences and my Union education will enable me adapt and thrive in this competitive field.

I owe a lot to Professor Melinda Goldner. Her “Sociology of Medicine” class has been one of my favorite courses. It really opened my eyes to the complexity of medicine and the frightening things that happen when insurance companies play a malicious role in denying patients care. Professor Goldner really influenced me; she taught me a lot about medicine and she’s always willing to talk with me about anything. She was amazing as my advisor for my independent project in Vietnam. And her fantastic knowledge of scientific and complementary alternative medicine made me want to be just as knowledgeable when treating my own patients someday.

I’m so grateful to instructors like Professor Goldner, to the Posse Foundation for selecting me, and to Union for accepting me as a student. Now, as I look toward graduation, I hope many others will have the opportunities I was so fortunate to enjoy as a Posse Scholar at Union.

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## BY ANTONIO GUTIERREZ

Class of 2010  
Boston, Mass.  
Major: Philosophy

I wanted to go to Union before I even heard of the Posse Foundation.

During an apple-picking trip to upstate New York—when I was a junior at Match Public Charter High School—we stopped to visit Union. My tutor, Dierdre Brody, was raised in Schenectady and brought us here because she thinks it's a great school. Almost instantly, I agreed. I was captured by the beauty of campus, the trimester system and the small classroom setting. I still remember telling Dierdre that day, "I am going to this school."

But finance was a major obstacle. Because I come from a low income family, affording a private school education would be very difficult. But then I found out about Posse and its relationship with Union—it was almost like fate. I'm confident I would have gone to college, but without the merit-based support of Posse, I am not sure where. Posse's given me the opportunity to attend my dream school.

More importantly, it's helped me become the first person in my family to go to college.

So, there's been a lot of pressure for me to do well. Posse has been instrumental in the successes I've had because when I arrived at Union, I had nine other scholars I could trust and rely on. They were there for me whenever I needed them and so was our advisor Maggie Tongue, director of Union's Scholars Program and Office of Post-Graduate Fellowships. Maggie has helped me through thick and thin. She was there for me when my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer, just as she was there for me with hugs when I made Dean's List or got a cool summer internship. I'm sure it would've been difficult for me to do so well without Maggie and my Posse.

Union hasn't disappointed me either.

In high school, I took classes at Boston University and I hated it. Their classrooms are huge and it's much harder to establish a relationship with a professor. I really think the student-teacher relationship is an important part of the learning experience. I'm still in close contact with my high school teachers, and at Union, I love that I can meet up with my professors. We have lunch and there are all sorts of other opportunities to connect, from the Philosophy Café to Minerva events. I thought coming to Union would be great because of its intimate size, and I was right.

Union's smallness has also given me the chance to make really good friends and study a very diverse curriculum. I've taken classes in all areas, from sociology, biology and music to English, chemistry and philosophy. I definitely feel that a liberal arts



*A group of local school children surround Antonio Gutierrez '10 at the Kenney Community Center after listening to him read a story.*

education has made me well-rounded and helped me focus on finding and cultivating my passions.

No department has done more for me in this respect than the community outreach department. Volunteering at the Kenney Community Center, you learn how to work with people and how to create bonds with people. There are also leadership opportunities and if I have an idea, center Director Angela Tatem or Outreach Coordinator Don Austin will point me in the right direction. While they inspire and back me, ultimately, it's on me to follow through.

I started a program called Champions, a new volunteer tutoring and mentoring program at Schenectady Youth Boxing and Fitness Inc. The gym called the College for assistance and I jumped on it because I love boxing. It was my responsibility to contact the gym directors, to find volunteers, to get certified to drive the van. These little things taught me a lot about responsibility and reliability, since the gym is counting on me too.

I love that Don and Angela have allowed me to use my ideas to foster change. No one ever tells me I can't do something and implementing my ideas has taught me to push myself when I'm discouraged. I also learned that no act of kindness, even if you can't immediately see the results or benefits, is ever a failure. You can touch the hearts of others through service, I know this from experience.

Growing up with a single mother, without a father figure around, I was helped by many non-profit organizations. I participated in Summer Search, Outward Bound West Colorado and Big Brothers Big Sisters in Boston. My Big Brother attended Boston University and brought me to campus often. He served as a male role model, exposing me to college early on. I think I was about nine years old then, and the time he spent with me meant something.

I became a volunteer myself to pay it forward. I want to extend the opportunities I had for fun, safe learning environments to students in my community—whether in Schenectady or Boston. After graduation, I plan to go to law school, because I think a law degree will allow me to do even more for others.

But before that, I'll spend a year working with students in low-income areas of Boston as a City Year volunteer. Many members of my family, including my cousin Jorge Palmarin and his wife, Ines, have also participated in City Year. From them, I learned being successful means making yourself a person of value. And what's more valuable than giving back? ■