

THE ECONOMIC CLUB
OF WASHINGTON, D.C.

SCHOLARS TO LEADERS

Miguel Portillo

2015 Scholarship Recipient



Miguel Portillo, Cohort of 2015

“My father always told me, ‘When I die, I’m not going to leave anything for you. The only thing you’ll have is your education.’”

For 2015 Economic Club Scholar Miguel Portillo, Columbia Heights was the community he called home. Born to El Salvadorian immigrant parents, Miguel witnessed tenacity and resilience in their purest forms, driven only by a desire for a better life and opportunity. Miguel’s mother and father endured back-breaking labor in the United States as teenagers to escape the war and conflict that marred their native land. Once they met and had children, Miguel’s parents continued to remind him that education was his key to success and sustainability. Miguel fondly remembers his parents’ work ethic, routine, and dedication to being great role models for him:

“My parents didn’t have the opportunity to attend college, but even now, I still look up to them for guidance and advice.”

Beyond his parent’s influence, Miguel describes the relationship between his love for knowledge and the diversity present within the city:

“The culture of D.C. is [my favorite part of living here] because the District is geographically small and segregated by socioeconomic status, so every region is filled with history. The music, go-go, tamales, all of it.”

After completing the ninth grade at Cesar Chavez Public Charter School, Miguel transferred into Capital City Public Charter High School to complete his diploma. He recalls the time an advisor from Capital City encouraged him to apply to a Smithsonian internship that later allowed him to learn about exhibits and evolutionary history in the National Museum of Natural Science, while working closely with the scientists who were a part of the team. Miguel credits this experience as his first internship and first exposure to a new career path, as he was unaware that he could become an evolutionary scientist like those who encountered in the position. Miguel graduated from Capital City as Valedictorian in 2015 and was soon recognized as an Economic Club Scholar. He didn’t know much about the Economic Club prior to applying and receiving the scholarship, but the opportunity prompted him to complete research on David Rubenstein and his philanthropic work. This research led him to think intentionally about business, technological evolution and its impact on society, and the ways in which he could fit into those fields as a future professional in

corporate America. In the midst of celebrating his high school graduation and the Economic Club scholarship, Miguel never forgot his roots and outlines his journey to becoming a recipient of the scholarship as one of the most unforgettable moments in his life because he was able to exceed his parents' expectations as the first person in his family to attend college.

During the summer following high school graduation, Miguel participated in the Economic Club Business Leadership Development Seminars at BET Networks and Accenture, crediting them both as great opportunities to network and further hone his interest in business:

"They were great introductions to the companies and the ways in which you can make a difference and create change. I ... was able to meet Debra Lee, the CEO of BET and build those types of connections. I met Marty Rodgers at Accenture and he was also very supportive. I feel that programs like these bring value to the Economic Club."

Miguel never compromised on academic excellence while in college and was warmly welcomed into Sewanee's *Order of the Gown*, which is an academic honor society that highlights academic distinction. Now a graduate with his Bachelor of Science in Computer Science and a minor in Business, Miguel's future shines brightly. He plans to join Deloitte's Virginia office as an analyst and continue his work in business and technology. Miguel hopes to pursue an MBA within the next five years, possibly at Harvard Business School in a similar fashion to the career path of Marty Rodgers. Upon the completion of his MBA, he plans to continue consulting at a strategy firm or pursue other top-tier opportunities in the business world. If he could package his life's work into a mission statement for a nonprofit, Miguel shared that it would be the following:

"To train young individuals into innovators."

This is rather fitting, given his commitment to supporting and encouraging minority youth in the District to prioritize education, technology and business to support their professional success. Miguel is a young man wise beyond his years, driven, and dedicated to the success of the communities he stands upon. In this spirit, he offers a word of encouragement to any other marginalized student who is entering corporate America and is able to relate to his background:

"Think about what skills can differentiate you from the person sitting next to you."

Miguel Portillo loves family, education and mentoring, and this affection shines through in everything he says or does. He is a shining star in his own right and is certainly one to watch.