

BOSTON COLLEGE

SCHOLARSHIP CELEBRATION



JAMES KIRWAN '23
Carroll School of Management

CONCENTRATION: Finance

HOMETOWN: Panama City Beach, Florida

SUPPORTED BY: The Emilson Family
Scholarship established by Herbert '52
and Paula Gordon Emilson

Featured Student Speaker

Good evening. First and foremost: to Mr. and Mrs. Emilson, who support my education at Boston College through their generous scholarship, I want to express my deepest gratitude.

I would also like to express my gratitude to all the donors and alumni who have shown their unconditional support by being present here tonight. It is because of you that many students like me—students who once could not even fathom coming to an elite university without tremendous debt—are able to receive substantial financial aid and thrive at Boston College.

My name is James Roberto Kirwan, and I am a successful BC student. Yes, I am prospering in my academic and extracurricular pursuits. I live amidst a campus community that supports and encourages me every day. However, my greatest achievement has been recognizing my own success. My path to get here was not easy, and I did not walk it alone.

I come from a Hispanic background. My mother was out of school after eighth grade and is still learning English day by day. My father dropped out of high school to serve the U.S. military in Vietnam. When my mother emigrated from Mexico to Florida with my father, they decided not to teach me or my two sisters Spanish so we could better assimilate into society. Growing up, there was almost shame attached to speaking Spanish or showing our Mexican identity outside of the house.

I also come from a low-income household. I never knew how much I didn't have until I left Florida. I started working as soon as I turned 14—that was my birthday present. My mom got me a job at Publix, because that is where she worked. Money became something I understood, and with that, I understood my family did not make a lot of it. In high school, I felt like I had to hide parts of myself to fit in. I started using my work money solely to buy secondhand clothing. I made excuses to avoid hanging with friends on the weekends, and sometimes left swim practice early so that I could work extra hours.



Jimmy's first paycheck

I am the first in my family to attend college. I navigated the college application process with no guidance from my parents, and asking little help from others. I did not want to draw attention to my status as a first-generation applicant.

Though I was uncomfortable with so much of my identity, I thought for sure that I was prepared for college; I knew how to be successful. I was a high-achieving salutatorian,



High school graduation with his parents and niece

juggling varsity swim, part-time employment, extracurricular clubs, friend drama, and preparation for my Speaker of Distinction graduation speech. On top of that, Hurricane Michael destroyed my high school in October of my senior year. I could be in a professional circus the way I juggled so many things so well.



With BC Orientation group

I was at work when I received my acceptance letter. I remember opening it on my break, and just sitting there in absolute shock. I texted my parents screenshots of the email and had the biggest grin on my face for the rest of the day. For the next few days, I kept reading and rereading the acceptance letter in disbelief, looking for the “just kidding” or “psyche! you’re rejected” in the fine print. My disbelief occurred again when I received my financial aid package, and thought to myself, “I’m actually going to be able to go here.” During this time, I did not feel any pressure from my parents or my friends, I was lucky in that they supported me in any choice I made. On April 30th, I visited BC, and immediately after, I paid the enrollment fee and bought some secondhand BC merch to show off my Eagle pride.

I arrived at the Heights on July 14th, 2019, for orientation. I loved my small group and was proud of my ability to build connections to others so fast. After orientation, I stayed on campus for another two weeks for the College Transition Program (CTP), which helps first-generation students acclimate to life at college. I then returned to take a weeklong trip to New Hampshire’s Umbagog Lake with the Wild Eagles, an adventure program for incoming freshman and transfer students. I met more friends, and I feel very grateful to Montserrat for funding the cost of my trip. Going into September, I was ready for a semester full of fun, full of friends, and full of memories.



Wild Eagles trip to New Hampshire

During my first week of class, I saw my Portico professor, Joseph Cioni with running shoes and shorts on, and flagged him down. We discovered a mutual love of running, and committed to run together soon. The following week, he invited me to run around the “Res” with him. We had a great conversation and continued to run together throughout the semester.

As my courses started, I began frequently seeing myself the way I imagined others were seeing me. During class, I could only think about how I was the “elephant in the room”; I felt different. I worried that my peers saw me wearing the same clothes too often or wondered how I got into BC. I often found myself sitting alone in class. I began to genuinely believe that I was not meant to be here.

Professor Cioni and I continued our runs together. Though at first, I was embarrassed to show vulnerability and true feeling, Professor Cioni made me feel more comfortable being honest and vulnerable. He helped me learn how to express my true self by making me feel seen and validated. Through our talks, a strong bond of support and mentorship was forged. It meant so much to me. It was this bond that led me to his office when I most needed help.



At BC’s College Transition Program (CTP)

By my second week of class, I was sitting on a bench outside Stokes, quietly sobbing in my hands. I was uncharacteristically sad and felt very alone. I decided to go to Professor Cioni’s office hours and tell him how I felt. Within five minutes, I could no longer hold in the tears. My voice was cracking, and he walked me over to University Counseling Services after we spoke.

My therapist at UCS helped me understand that there are plenty of other students on every campus who are struggling with their identity. I told him how I thought people saw me: I didn’t look Hispanic enough for the

Hispanic clubs, I didn't look low-income enough to be in Montserrat, I didn't look enough like a first-generation college student. My therapist helped me grasp the idea that there is no platonic image of these qualities, and that having multiple facets could help me find other people who were going through the same things I was. Everyone in the First-Generation Club looks different, and there is truly diversity all around me accessible through honesty and personal connection. I am so grateful for my therapist and Boston College's commitment to University Counseling Services, which is accessible to any student who needs it.

At BC, I've learned that success can be counted in more ways than one. One positive of being first-generation is that my parents just want to see me become successful in whatever way means most to me. I have mentors and friends who care for me, and I have been in a relationship for six months. I am the freshman representative for

AHANA Management Academy and am working on campus at the Student Affairs Business Service Center. I am in the DJ Club, which is hosting a DJ Showcase this semester which I am trying to perform in. I am in the First-Generation Club, and I contribute to the *Stylus* literary and art magazine. Most importantly though, I am genuinely happy at BC.

As for my future, and as a freshman, I have a few ideas of what I might want to do in the future. Through the Learning to Learn office, I am in the McNair Exploratory Program and am waiting to hear back from the McNair Scholars Program, which helps prepare undergraduates from underrepresented backgrounds to pursue graduate education and careers in academia. One of my principal goals is to become a public prosecutor and work for the people. I also hope to one day return to Boston College and become a professor in law. I know I have received so much help from faculty, and someday I want to be in that same position to give back. I will trust in myself and in the support of my community along every step of this path I hope to travel.

My name is James Roberto Kirwan, and I am successful. I am successful because I am not alone. I am not alone because of my scholarship donors, Mr. and Mrs. Emilson. I am not alone because of Professor Kent Greenfield; Professor Joseph Cioni; my Learning to Learn mentor Sara Wong; and countless others who are helping me progress. I am successful because I embrace who I am. At BC, I can embrace my intersectional and unique identity while seeking others like me. I am successful because I believe in myself, and because others believe in me too. To that end, I again want to make special mention of my gratitude to Mr. and Mrs. Emilson, as well as you, the donors who support undergraduate financial aid at Boston College. Your support makes so many incredible things possible.

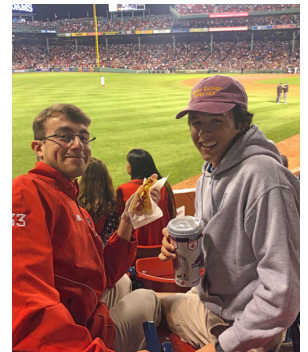
Thank you.



*Convocation Day with
Keyes North 4th floor*



*Jimmy and girlfriend, Nikki,
at a BC Football game*



First Red Sox game