

# The Palm Beach Post

LAKE WORTH

## Free tuition, housing, meals and books: FAU program offers Lake Worth Beach students chance of lifetime

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From left, Florida Atlantic University students Natalia Escovar, Dodlee Mosilme, Esther Consuegra, and Jackelin Guzman-Alvarez pose for a picture outside their dorm building, Atlantic Park Towers, at Florida Atlantic University on Wednesday, October 25, 2022, in Boca Raton, FL. The students are part of the Kelly/Strul Emerging Scholars Program, which pays the college costs - tuition, books, housing and meals - of first-generation, low-income students so they can graduate debt free. *ANDRES LEIVA/THE PALM BEACH POST*

**LAKE WORTH BEACH** — Attending college was never a question for Esther Consuegra. Paying for it was another matter.

Consuegra, 18, is a graduate of G-Star School of the Arts in Palm Springs with hopes of a future in graphic design. Her plan this fall was to attend Palm Beach State College, mainly because it's five minutes from her [Lake Worth Beach](#) home and the best fit for her budget.



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But even staying home didn't assure Consuegra she could fund her schooling costs. Her father and mother, Cuban immigrants who came to the U.S. in 2003 and are now divorced, work as a handyman and hotel housekeeper, respectively. Esther lives with her mom.

"I don't know how we would have covered the costs for college," Consuegra said.

Thanks to the [Kelly/Strul Emerging Scholars Program](#), which provides full scholarships to Florida Atlantic University for first generation, low-income students, Consuegra's financial worries regarding college are over.



Florida Atlantic University students Natalia Escovar, left, Esther Consuegra and Dodlee Mosilme ride an elevator down to the ground floor of their dorm building, Atlantic Park Towers, on Wednesday, October 25, 2022, in Boca Raton, FL. The students are part of the Kelly/Strul Emerging Scholars Program, which pays the college costs - tuition, books, housing and meals - of first-generation, low-income students so they can graduate debt free. *ANDRES LEIVA/THE PALM BEACH POST*

Consuegra is one of four 2021 high school graduates from Lake Worth Beach — along with Lake Worth High School alums Natalia Escovar, Jackelin Guzman-Alvarez and Dodlee Mosilme — awarded scholarships that pay for four years of tuition, on-campus housing, books, a meal plan and additional resources while permitting the students to graduate debt-free.



In the context of the Kelly/Strul program, "first generation" is defined as students whose parents did not complete a four-year degree.

Keven Allen, who oversees FAU's program, says the cost of the scholarship is around \$100,000.

"The No. 1 barrier to a college education for a first-generation student is financial," Allen said. "They're not needy or lacking in any other way. The only thing we're doing is reducing those barriers and allowing what the students already possess to shine."

## For Haitian student, program is more than a financial lifeline

Mosilme, a Lake Worth High School graduate, said his parents emigrated from Haiti around 2000 "chasing the American Dream."

But it's Mosilme, 20, who may have a real chance to live it. A sophomore at FAU, Mosilme will major in biology with an eye on medical school, where he'd like to consider specializing in neurology, cardiology or general surgery.

Going to college for free, Mosilme said, gives his family "hope" that he can achieve his goals "and go on to do great things" without the burden of spending years paying off college loans.

For Mosilme and the others, the scholarship program is not just a financial lifeline. Students are provided with an academic advisor, a program coach and a peer mentor to ease the transition to a college workout.

For instance, Mosilme was paired with Shyra Johnson, a Kelly/Strul scholarship recipient and graduate, who has the distinction of being one of the youngest sports agents in history at age 21.

Johnson, Mosilme said, has "pushed me and encouraged me to dig deeper for what I want."

Mentoring is part of a 17-step program within the program known as "The Path," which also includes financial literacy, career planning, social gatherings and networking opportunities.



Dodlee Mosilme, a Florida Atlantic University student from Lake Worth Beach, poses for a portrait at Florida Atlantic University on Wednesday, October 25, 2022, in Boca Raton, FL. Mosilme is part of the Kelly/Strul Emerging Scholars Program, which pays the college costs - tuition, books, housing and meals - of first-generation, low-income students so they can graduate debt free. ANDRES LEIVA/THE PALM BEACH POST





"This is not a program where we hand them money, pay for their classes and hope for the best," Allen said.

## **FAU scholarship program started in 2017**

Of the 95 students who entered the program since it was created by philanthropists Aubrey and Sally Strul along with FAU President John Kelly and his wife Carolyn in 2017, 22 have graduated, including two from Lake Worth Beach. There are 66 students currently in the program.

That includes Jaireen Ruiz, who fell in love with teaching when she was a kid growing up in Lake Worth Beach and fulfilled her dream when she was hired this year as a kindergarten teacher at South Olive Elementary School in [West Palm Beach](#).

Not attending college "wasn't an option for me", Ruiz said, but as she prepared to graduate from Lake Worth High, she wondered how she would pay for it.

Ruiz now serves as an ambassador for the program, sharing its life-changing impact.

She says students "value the program because it also sees the value in us as students. It knows that we are capable, that we are more than enough to succeed in an environment that we normally wouldn't succeed in because of finances."

### **For Lake Worth Beach student, 'pressure taken off my shoulders'**

Escovar, 18, can relate. She was set on attending FAU before she was accepted for a Kelly/Strul scholarship and planned to take out loans. Getting by "without this program would have been difficult — financially and adjusting to the college culture," Escovar said.



Jaireen Ruiz, a graduate of Lake Worth Community High School and FAU, is a kindergarten teacher at South Olive Elementary School in West Palm Beach. *Contributed*



She hears her friend's concerns about the cost of books and tuition and even the expense of driving four or five times a week from Lake Worth Beach to FAU's campus in Boca Raton.

"I'm really grateful that I don't have to worry about things like that," said Escovar, who is deciding between majoring in environmental engineering or chemistry. "That kind of pressure is really taken off my shoulders."

Nearly 90% first-generation, low-income students will leave college without a degree, according to The First Generation Foundation.

The numbers are far different with Kelly/Strul participants. Beyond the 22 students who have received degrees, the other 44 participants are on track to graduate within four years. No one has dropped or flunked out, Allen said.



Natalia Escovar, a Florida Atlantic University student from Lake Worth Beach, poses for a portrait at Florida Atlantic University on Wednesday, October 25, 2022, in Boca Raton, FL. Escovar is part of the Kelly/Strul Emerging Scholars Program, which pays the college costs - tuition, books, housing and meals - of first-generation, low-income students so they can graduate debt free. *ANDRES LEIVA/THE PALM BEACH POST*



Jackelin Guzman-Alvarez, a Florida Atlantic University student from Lake Worth Beach, poses for a picture at Florida Atlantic University on Wednesday, October 25, 2022, in Boca Raton, FL. Guzman-Alvarez is part of the Kelly/Strul Emerging Scholars Program, which pays the college costs - tuition, books, housing and meals - of first-generation, low-income students so they can graduate debt free. *ANDRES LEIVA/THE PALM BEACH POST*

Jackelin Guzman-Alvarez is the second member of her family to receive a Kelly/Strul scholarship. Her cousin, Jessica Alvarez, graduated from FAU this summer in three years.



Guzman-Alvarez, who plans a career in nursing, said the program has helped her "come out of my shell" and though it took "awhile to adjust to living on campus and the college courses, I think I'm getting the hang of it."

Applications for next year's scholarship recipients can be found at [kellystrulscholars.fau.edu/apply](https://kellystrulscholars.fau.edu/apply).

