



Immigrant Student Earns Highly Selective College Scholarship

Gabriela Rodríguez will receive up to \$40,000 annually while she completes her bachelor's degree at the University of Miami

By [Ana Cuervo](#)

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A student who immigrated from Cuba won a prestigious scholarship. (Published Monday, June 25, 2018)

What to Know

- **Local student Gabriela Rodríguez is the recipient of Jack Kent Cooke Foundation Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship**
- **She will receive up to \$40,000 annually while she attends the University of Miami**

As a child, Gabriela Rodríguez found a way to shine on the stage as a student of classical ballet -- but her future would take her to a very different stage.

Gabriela faced the challenge of arriving to the U.S. with her parents just before her 15th birthday.

"I didn't know anything," she recalled. "I am a very social person and coming here to a new country with new culture, new people -- I just felt that it wasn't my place

But Gabriela quickly learned English, studied hard and found her place in honors and advanced placement classes. She was determined to succeed.

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"My biggest motivation ever is my parents," she said. "I am an only child; they left everything in Cuba to come here."

Her parents taught her the United States is the country of the freedom and opportunities they wanted her to have in her life.

"I feel like it's my duty to be a better person and to become someone because they did this for me," Gabriela said.

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From high school, she went on to the Honors Program at Miami Dade College, where she was president of the Phi Theta Kappa President Honor Society. When she graduated, she won the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship.

Chosen among thousands of other graduates, she will receive up to \$40,000 annually to complete her bachelor's degree. She was admitted to several top universities, but she chose the University of Miami.

"I chose UM because it's my dream school," she said. "I've always wanted to come here. I love Miami, I love UM, my family that's lived here before. It's all about the 'U.'"

Her story is similar to that of Dr. Eduardo Padron's, president of Miami Dade College, who fled from Cuba at the same age.

"No English, no money, I didn't understand the culture," he said. "But I took advantage of every opportunity that was given to me, and the rest is history."

History that has been made by many students at Miami Dade college.

"Gabriela is an example, like many immigrant students who come to this nation in search of opportunities, in search of freedom," Padron said. "He applied herself, she put her energies to work, and she has been one of the best students we've ever had. And she's a reflection of so many others."

Dancing is still part of her life as she shares the passion and the discipline that contributed to her success with young dancers as a volunteer instructor.

Her priority is to continue her studies, until she becomes a cardiothoracic surgeon.

Gabriela's ultimate goal is that her education one day allows her to save lives, which will make her hard work and her parents' sacrifices more than worth it.

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