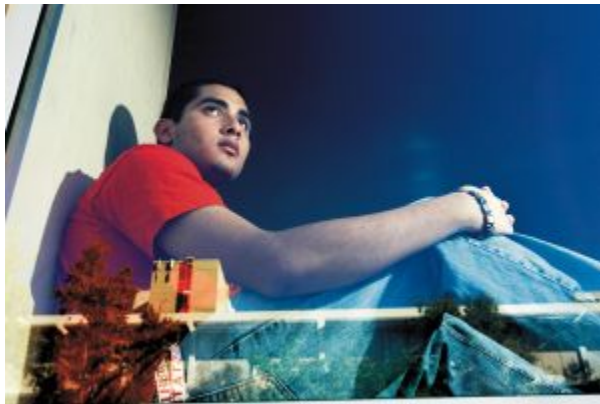


THE CHRONICLE

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Mystery Gifts Help Thousands of Students Get Through College



Todd Bigelow

Two years ago, Carlos Barrera moved alone to the United States from El Salvador in the hope of going to college. He is doing so this fall, having won one of the freshman honors scholarships that California State U. at Northridge created with \$5-million from a mystery donor.

[Enlarge Photo](#)

By Emma L. Carew

Months after an anonymous donor captivated the nation by giving a total of more than \$100-million to some 20 colleges, students and faculty members on many of those campuses are reaping the benefits.

More than \$6-million of the donations, specified largely for need-based scholarships for female or minority students, has already been awarded, and at least \$3-million more is expected to be spent on scholarships, faculty support, and building projects this year, according to a *Chronicle* analysis.

At least 3,000 students have received support, ranging from \$100 in book money to four years' worth of tuition.

Most of the beneficiary colleges have socked the money away in endowments and other investments, with many trying to raise matching funds that will enlarge their gifts—and keep the spigot flowing—for years. About 20 percent of the total was given with no strings attached, allowing colleges to start sending dollars out the door immediately.

Colleges have used portions of those unrestricted gifts to support faculty research in new areas, create endowed chairs, and jump-start capital projects. The City University of New York's Hunter College plans to devote \$1-million of its \$5-million donation to help renovate its library.

Many colleges have used the money to patch financial gaps left by state budget shortfalls and declines in private donations, and to ease pressure on families as a result of the recession.

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Jay Premack

Spouses of military personnel, like Lynda C. Jackson, who is pursuing a doctorate in management, are among more than 1,700 students at the U. of Maryland University College to receive financial aid this year from an anonymous gift of \$6-million.

Much of the scholarship money has gone to support first-generation students, students from low-income communities, and those who would have otherwise been unable to matriculate this fall. Montclair State University used a small portion of its gift to award emergency scholarships to needy students who hope to graduate this year.

Significantly more students will benefit in 2010, as colleges prepare new scholarship programs. The University of Southern Mississippi will award 200 scholarships next semester to female and minority students to help bridge the gap between what they receive in federal aid and the cost of attendance.

Next fall Purdue University plans to award four-year renewable scholarships covering much of the cost of attendance, designed to entice students from urban areas.

Stretching the Dollars

Like families across the country, many of the colleges that lucked into the money are trying to stretch each dollar as far as possible.

Michigan State University, which received \$10-million, the most of any recipient, hopes to triple its donation through matching gifts, says Robert W. Groves, vice president for university advancement.

The university has put \$7-million of its gift into its endowment, with the hope of creating 300 annual need-based scholarships of \$5,000 each. About a third of the university's 46,000 students come from the Detroit metropolitan area, which has been hard hit by the recession.

Michigan State hopes to start the matching-gift campaign this month, focused on keeping students enrolled through the economic downturn. Last year, however, Michigan State experienced about a 20-percent decline in private donations, Mr. Groves says.

California State University at Northridge, which landed \$5-million in mystery money last year, months before many other recipients got theirs, put the full amount into a freshman honors scholarship program. The first payout came this fall, sending a total of \$35,000 to nine students. The university hopes the partial scholarships will help support 30 students next year and 50 a year thereafter.

"It made possible things that we could only dream of previously," says Vance T. Peterson, vice president for university advancement.

One of the scholarship winners is Carlos Barrera, a first-generation, 18-year-old Salvadoran immigrant who moved to the United States alone two years ago in the hope of going to college. The scholarship means he doesn't have to take out loans or worry about holding down a job while enrolled.

The University of Hawaii at Hilo, which received \$1.5-million, one of the smallest anonymous gifts, is using it to raise additional funds. So far the effort has brought in an extra \$250,000 for endowed scholarships, says Rose Tseng, the chancellor. The small, rural campus hopes to raise an additional \$1-million in matching gifts.

Gladys Sonomura, an alumna of Hilo, read about the mystery donations in the local newspaper and decided she wanted to give, too—\$150,000 for scholarships. "I was just thrilled to know that we were picked by an anonymous donor," says Ms. Sonomura, who created eight endowed scholarships and named them after her four grandchildren.

Donors like Ms. Sonomura may be rare, says Bruce W. Flessner, a fund-raising consultant. Colleges traditionally have more success with matching campaigns for gifts from known donors, he says. "It's easier if you can kind of show this wonderful individual and talk about their stepping up and challenging other people to do it, instead of just this money from heaven."

Spending the Money

The University of Maryland University College, an institution without a sophisticated fund-raising department, certainly views the \$6-million it received as money from heaven. Many of its 90,000 students are part-time and working students with immediate financial needs. The university has spent \$2.6-million of the donation on student aid this summer and fall, and expects to exhaust its donation within five years.

Since March 1, a total of 1,772 students at the university have received scholarships or awards, the majority receiving \$100 for books. Others were awarded tuition scholarships, ranging from \$3,000 to \$5,000. The money went to support transfer students from community colleges and spouses of military personnel, says Cathy Sweet-Windham, vice president for institutional advancement.

Lynda C. Jackson received a military-spouse scholarship last spring to cover the tuition for her final semester in her doctoral program in management.

Ms. Jackson, 55, herself a retired Air Force colonel, recently defended her dissertation, which looked at the success factors of minority students wanting to reach executive levels. She had been receiving GI Bill money, but it ran out last spring. "We were elated to find there was an opportunity to get me over the hump," she says.

Somewhere between spending the mystery millions and saving the money lies the University of Alaska at Anchorage. It put \$5-million of its \$7-million gift into an endowed scholarship fund. The remaining \$2-million was split equally between finishing construction on the Conoco Phillips Integrated Science Building and providing 50 scholarships to needy students this fall.

The gift will allow Anchorage to spend about \$360,950 this year on need-based scholarships, far more than it used to spend. (Before the mystery donation showed up, the university had \$110,950 available for need-based scholarships.)

Theresa Olanna, a first-generation college student from a rural part of Alaska, landed one of those additional awards. She had started searching for a scholarship two years ago, knowing she couldn't afford college without a lot of financial assistance.

Most students from Shishmaref, a village of 600 on the Bering Strait, don't go on to college. Ms. Olanna hopes to return to her village one day to work as a physician's assistant.

She received a package of need-based aid and scholarships that will cover her full cost of attendance this year, \$6,230 of which came from the mystery donor. The money will help her focus on her studies rather than worry about finding a way to cover her tuition.

The scholarship from the anonymous donor proves that others have faith in her, says Ms. Olanna. "It makes me want to show them I am worth the investment they are putting into my education."

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<http://chronicle.com/article/Mystery-Gifts-Help-housands/48836/?key=Gzp0IVVhZidKYycyeiEQLCsDbXt9JRp4bnJPN3wabV9W>

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On the Trail of the Mystery Gifts

Over the past year or so, 20 colleges have received a total of more than \$100-million in anonymous donations that probably came from one mystery donor. The chart below shows how much money each institution received, how much institutions have already spent, and how many students have benefited.

Institution	Amount received	Amount already spent	Number of student recipients
Michigan State U.	\$10,000,000	0	0
Purdue U.	\$8,000,000	0	0
U. of Alaska at Anchorage	\$7,000,000	\$116,500	50
U. of Iowa	\$7,000,000	\$759,500	50
Binghamton U.	\$6,000,000	\$180,000	260
U. of Maryland University College	\$6,000,000	\$2,600,000	1,772*
U. of North Carolina at Greensboro	\$6,000,000	0	0
U. of Southern Mississippi	\$6,000,000	0	0
U. of Colorado at Colorado Springs	\$5,500,000	Did not report	312
California State U. at Northridge	\$5,000,000	\$35,000	7
City U. of New York Hunter College	\$5,000,000	\$700,000	900
Montclair State U.	\$5,000,000	\$30,000	9
Temple U.	\$5,000,000	\$125,000	37
U. of Alabama at Birmingham	\$5,000,000	0	0
U. of South Florida	\$5,000,000	\$303,500	22
Norfolk State U.	\$3,500,000	\$559,302	133
Pennsylvania State U. at Harrisburg	\$3,000,000	\$220,612	78
Kalamazoo College	\$2,000,000	\$187,525	52
U. of Hawaii at Hilo	\$1,500,000	\$250,000	10
U. of North Carolina at Asheville	\$1,500,000	\$285,000	31
TOTALS	\$103,000,000	\$6,351,940	3,723

* Includes 1,425 book scholarships

Source: *Chronicle* reporting

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