



UFM

UNIVERSIDAD FRANCISCO MARROQUÍN

ita

Impulso al Talento Académico

P R O F I L E

## David's Story

# *What If Your Family Broke the Cycle?*



David's parents came from families trapped in a self-perpetuating cycle of poverty in Guatemala City.

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*“My mother was one of eleven children born to a single mother. They had a system worked out: Each of the older siblings would be responsible for the expenses of one of the younger ones—paying for their food, buying them shoes.”*

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David's paternal grandparents had very little formal education and his grandfather worked only sporadically, repairing televisions and other electronics in small homes around the city.

When they were young, both of David's parents became involved in a local church. David credits their faith with transforming their lives. They postponed marriage and children in order to complete their high school educations. After graduating, David's mother began work as an elementary school teacher. David's father worked at a small business that sold window treatments, doing paperwork and basic administrative tasks, while aspiring to continue his education.

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*“When I was twelve years old, my father began his university education, studying for a degree in business administration. It was his example that first inspired me to study business.”*

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When David was eleven years old, his parents constructed their first home—a one-room house on his grandparents' property. David, his parents, and his younger brother remained there for eight years, until they had earned enough to build something larger.

Despite their hard work, economic conditions continued to be challenging. David recalls that when he was young, his family had to sell a number of household items to pay back the loan they had taken to purchase a car.

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*“One day some men arrived and took the TV, the dinner table, and the refrigerator. I will never forget the frustration I saw on my parents' faces.”*

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David attended an inexpensive private school for several years before enrolling in an experimental public high school that had a reputation for having better teachers and fewer gangs than many local schools. It offered a combination of technical training—in carpentry, food preparation, electrical work, dressmaking, and other areas—alongside a traditional high school curriculum. David chose metalworking as his technical field and studied hard, hoping to earn a scholarship that would allow him to transfer to a private school for his last two years.

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*“I was one of twenty-five students in Guatemala who earned a scholarship to one of the best private schools in the country.”*

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David’s new high school catered to the elite of Guatemalan society and cost as much as, or more than, a private university education. David took full advantage of all of the academic and extracurricular opportunities available to him. He played on the basketball team, played trumpet in the school band, and was a youth leader at his church, all while maintaining a high grade point average.

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*“I had a very demanding schedule. The bus picked me up at six in the morning and I didn’t return home until six at night. Then I would start my homework.”*

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### **Applying for the ITA Scholarship**

David went to church with a former ITA scholar who encouraged him to apply to UFM. Knowing that the odds of winning the scholarship were not in his favor, he also applied to the national public university. After taking the admissions exams, David was one of thirty-two students selected to interview for the six ITA scholarships available.

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*“During the scholarship interview process, I met other students who are a lot like me—people with a hunger to follow their dreams.”*

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David watched the group of candidates dwindle over two days of intensive interviews; he says he felt a great peace when he found out that he had been accepted, safe in the knowledge that he would truly be able to pursue his dreams.

### **Studying at UFM**

David’s high school had high academic standards, and he noticed that he struggled less with the transition to UFM than many of his ITA colleagues. Since David had received a partial scholarship that only covered his tuition, after his first year, he asked the university for permission to get a job to help his parents pay for his living expenses.

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*“When you are an ITA student, you understand the reality of poverty in Guatemala. You know that there is no free lunch, that you have to work very hard and take advantage of every opportunity that you are offered.”*

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David found his first job at UFM's New Media Department. Later, he looked for jobs in his field; he found work doing statistical data entry at a free-market think tank and as a teacher's assistant at the university. David was scheduled to graduate in 2008, but in his last year he joined a small group of economics students that had a unique proposition for the faculty at UFM.

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*"We petitioned for an extra semester in advanced economics classes to be offered to our group. I knew that in order to pursue a master's degree in economics, it would be important to study these concepts."*

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David and his classmates were successful in their endeavor and after he graduated magna cum laude in 2009, he became the youngest instructor at UFM's School of Economic Sciences.



### Postgraduation Career

In addition to teaching, David also works with the think tank where he got his start in data entry. Today, as one of the group's head researchers, he makes projections about Guatemala's economic conditions. Though the center does consulting work for many private and public entities, David feels most passionate about the work it does in preparation for Guatemala's political elections. Every election cycle, the group uses diagnostics to evaluate Guatemala's health and stability in terms of education, economic viability, and security. They use these assessments to develop a set of practical political proposals that they present to both policymakers and private business people.

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*"We believe that change is possible in the government, beginning with ideas that are friendly to a competitive market. As researchers, we have a great deal of freedom to propose ideas that we believe will make Guatemala a better place to live."*

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David is also part of the research team with the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM), a comparative international study of entrepreneurship in which UFM is a partner. With this

project, he goes out into the field to measure entrepreneurship in rural areas, with an eye towards identifying trends. The long-term goal of the program is to develop public policies or private initiatives that will make it easier to do business in countries like Guatemala.

Finally, but perhaps most significantly from David's perspective, he remains active in the same church he has attended since he was born. He was recently named an assistant pastor for youth and he helps to organize retreats and missionary trips.

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*“It has always been clear to me that all of the opportunities that I have been given in my academic and professional life have a purpose: to be a role model for others and to help those in need.”*

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