



UFM

UNIVERSIDAD FRANCISCO MARROQUÍN

ita

Impulso al Talento Académico

P R O F I L E

Paul's Story

How Have Your Parents Inspired You?



In Paul's hometown, most students never made it past elementary school.

"The problem with my town is that even if you graduate from high school, the most you can hope for is a job in agriculture or a chance to own a small store."

Many families from the verdant Baja Verapaz department of Guatemala support themselves growing black beans, tomatoes, lettuce, chili peppers, and squash. The young people who aspire to a better life, especially men, generally leave Guatemala, crossing into the United States illegally. Very few people see education as a means of improving their lot in life and even fewer can afford to pay for private school.

Paul's parents were different. His father was a teacher and radio announcer whose greatest passion was reading.

"My father left for work at five-thirty in the morning and didn't return until after eight o'clock at night. Every evening, he would stay up reading until midnight."

Paul's mother had married young and dropped out of school before completing sixth grade. At the age of thirty, however, she went back to school and became a teacher. Paul watched his mother complete elementary, middle, and high school just a few grades ahead of himself.

Paul, his older brother, and their mother all attended public school. Paul notes that the public education in his town is commensurate with that of other rural areas, but that it falls far short of the level of both public and private instruction in Guatemala City.

"There were serious deficiencies in mathematics and English and we hardly did any reading. I was never once required to read an entire book for school."

Nonetheless, Paul acquired a voracious appetite for literature from his father and he excelled in the academic and creative activities his school offered. He won essay and short story contests and travelled to Guatemala City twice through state-sponsored education initiatives.

Although Paul dreamed of attending a university, all of the high schools in town only offered technical job training programs. Paul enrolled in the program to become a teacher, like his parents.

Applying for the ITA Scholarship

Paul graduated at the top of his class. He won a prestigious national award for academic excellence and was sent information on several universities in Guatemala as well as scholarships—including the ITA program at UFM.

“My mother and I visited the campus and it was love at first sight. The admissions exam and interview processes were emotional because I knew how disappointed I would be if I didn’t get the scholarship.”

The mathematics exam was the first obstacle Paul faced; when he began preparing for the admissions test, he discovered a wide gulf between his school’s curriculum and UFM’s expectations. He studied math every day for a month to prepare.

Paul passed the admissions exams and distinguished himself from the other candidates in a series of rigorous interviews. Paul was one of just five students awarded ITA scholarships in 1999.

Studying at UFM

Paul’s first semester at UFM was filled with academic and social challenges.

“I cried after my first math class because I literally had no idea what the teacher was talking about.”

Like many ITAs, Paul also struggled with assigned reading and lectures in English. He found himself having trouble making small talk with his classmates, many of whom talked casually about vacations abroad and American television shows. In the midst of this struggle, Paul considered giving up and going home.

“My parents told me they would support me, whatever I decided. Ultimately, I said to myself, I might fail, but I am not going to give up without a fight.”

Paul stayed through the end of the first semester and then gradually grew more comfortable with both the course material and the other students. He rose to the top tier of his class and during his junior year, he was one of ten students selected to travel to New York for a series of finance seminars at the New York Stock Exchange. With a loan from a relative in the United States, Paul set foot on an airplane for the first time in his life. Subsequently, he continued to pursue opportunities to travel and in his senior year, Paul was accepted to an exchange program at Chile’s Pontificia Universidad Católica. In 2005, he graduated magna cum laude from UFM’s School of Economic Sciences.



Postgraduation Career

Paul worked as a financial analyst in both the private and public sectors before returning to Chile in 2009 to earn a master's degree in economics. He financed graduate school through a combination of scholarships and short-term consulting work. Upon completion of the program, he returned to his job as director of economics at a local business alliance where he analyzed the Guatemalan and global economic climate and advocated for business interests in both local and international forums. Today, Paul works at a private foundation that promotes the principles of freedom and rule of law throughout Guatemala and Central America.

“I enjoy contributing to the political conversation regarding issues that affect our national economic health.”

Paul's success is well-known in his hometown. He says that a number of teachers, including his mother, have started to use the ITA program as a tool to motivate students.

“My mother talked about my scholarship all the time, so students could see what was possible for someone with the same resources and the same education they had. She helped inspire three future ITA scholars.”
