



UFM

UNIVERSIDAD FRANCISCO MARROQUÍN

ita

Impulso al Talento Académico

P R O F I L E

Iran's Story

How Does a Country Boy Find His Place in the City?



Iran and his three sisters grew up in the same small, rural town where his parents were born in the province of El Progreso. All of the houses in town were built in the traditional mud brick adobe style and, until four years ago, it could not lay claim to a single paved road.

“Everyone in my town, with very few exceptions, is a subsistence farmer. My family and all of our neighbors raised enough corn and beans to cover our basic needs.”

Neither of Iran's parents completed elementary school; nonetheless, they encouraged all of their children to get an education. Although Iran attended a small local elementary school, he knew that the public schools in Guatemala City had a better reputation. When he turned twelve, he elected to move into his sister's home in the capital to improve the quality of his education.

Iran discovered that the level of the courses in Guatemala City was dramatically more difficult than what he had encountered in his hometown, and he struggled academically in the transition. He also endured what he describes as culture shock, having moved from a town whose population he estimates was seven hundred to a city of over two million people. In the midst of these challenges, Iran had to work with his sister to pay for food and clothing.

“I didn't have time to process the emotional shock of what I was experiencing. I worked at a copy center before school started at seven o'clock in the morning and again after school. Then I started my homework.”

Nevertheless, Iran continued to look for opportunities to raise the bar for himself. After one year in Guatemala City, he applied for admission to an experimental public school that combined academically rigorous courses with training in technical skills. Because of the scarcity of public options for quality education in Guatemala, the school was flooded with applicants. Iran passed an admissions exam and won one of the 160 spaces at the school. Two years later he learned about a scholarship opportunity at the American School of Guatemala, a prestigious and expensive private high school. After more exams and a series of rigorous interviews, Iran was one of twenty-five students selected from approximately one thousand applicants.

Iran's transition to the American School was his most difficult one yet. Socially, Iran found himself surrounded by students who represented a segment of the population he had never encountered before.

“On my first day of school, I was surprised to see a number of students arriving in expensive cars with bodyguards in the backseat.”

He also discovered that he had another serious disadvantage—up to this point, he had not learned a single word of English.

“I remember my teacher asked me a simple question in English—Are you happy? I looked around, because I had no idea what she had said.”

In order to make up for the fact that he couldn't read any of his textbooks, Iran formed study groups with other students and hovered outside of classrooms with questions for his teachers about the lectures. In the space of just two years, and with the support of his classmates and teachers, Iran taught himself enough English to pass both the written and the oral examinations required to graduate.

Applying for the ITA Scholarship

Though the American School had provided its students with extensive information about universities, Iran received no information on scholarships. He had long nursed a desire to study business administration at a private university, but he also knew this was far beyond his means. He determined to find a way to pursue this dream.

“I had heard a rumor that people who worked at UFM for more than a year received a discount on their tuition, so I immediately got a job as a parking lot attendant at the university.”

After six months of working in the parking lot, Iran took the admissions exams, hoping to enroll at UFM the following semester; it was during the exam that he learned about the ITA scholarship program.

Studying at UFM

Iran was no stranger to academic challenges when he arrived at UFM, having already changed schools three times to progressively more ambitious environments. However, he found himself facing a formidable social hurdle. His high school had a separate section of classes for scholarship recipients, which was both a protective and comforting environment for them. In contrast, at UFM, ITA students intermingled with all the other students. Through group projects and personal effort, Iran reached out to the students he felt isolated from. In his junior year, when he qualified for an exclusive invitation to a series of lectures in New York, but wasn't able to afford the trip, his wealthier classmates banded together in support.

“My fellow students pooled money for my expenses and loaned me winter clothes. It was at UFM that I first learned the value of building relationships with people of different backgrounds.”



Postgraduation Career

After graduating, Iran worked with a publishing company’s program to help students visualize goals for themselves and their country and the steps they would take to achieve them.

A year later, Iran applied for a scholarship to the INCAE MBA program in Nicaragua, whose mission is to develop and train future national leaders to be agents for change in their countries. Each year, the program offers one scholarship to each country in Central America; in 2010, Iran was the student selected from Guatemala. But before he could accept the scholarship, he had to decide if this was the right moment to go away considering his father had been diagnosed with cancer.

“While I was in Nicaragua, my father had several crises due to his cancer. Those were the only times in my academic career when I felt like turning back and going home.”

After serious consideration, and after much discussion with his family, Iran elected to stay in Nicaragua. While his father still struggles with his health, Iran and his family feel confident that he made the right decision in fulfilling the promise of his scholarship and completing the MBA program.

Iran returned home to Guatemala and he has recently accepted a position as the head of sales for a sugar producer and exporter. Iran is proud to work for a company that is one of Guatemala’s leaders in implementing socially responsible business practices, such as the construction of schools and infrastructure. Furthermore, Iran believes his success provides a healthy model for young people from his community to follow.

"When I was growing up everyone I knew seemed to be predestined to work as small farmers. I want people to know they can fight for seemingly impossible dreams."
