

The day I saw that acceptance confirmation turned out to be one of the best moments of my life; I knew a new chapter in my life was about to begin. First thing I did was pick up the phone and call my mother. I remember choking on my own words pacing back and forth outside my work place and wiping the tears as I told my hero, that her son would be a first-generation college student at the U of I. Who would've ever imagined that this kid with odds stacked against him would make it to a prestigious institution like this. I'm proud to say that statistically speaking I shouldn't be here. A young Latino male from a single parent household whose mother worked seven days a week to provide the essentials for the family and not much more isn't supposed to make it this far.

I beat the odds. I say I am proud of this because attending the U of I has given me the opportunity to become the person who I dreamed of as kid, and none of this would have been possible without the I- Promise scholarship. The I-Promise scholarship is what has given many students like myself the opportunity to create new endings to the stories of the poor, a new face to what a university graduate looks like. I can humbly say that I-Promise has been a blessing that I could never thank enough for. I hope to one day be able to proudly hand over a donation check knowing that the reason I am who I am was because someone decided that money shouldn't be a factor of the quality of my education.

The next step of my journey to the U of I was just as terrifying as waiting on an acceptance letter. I knew that I couldn't afford tuition in my wildest dreams even if we sold what little we had. My mom offered to help me with what little she had out of her love for me, and her desires to see her son become the man she knew I could be. I have always preferred my mom to take care of my younger sibling's needs before mine; I felt guilty taking anything that I knew could help them instead. I knew that knot in your stomach feeling and confusion of what it's like being around kids who had more than you, and I didn't want them to ever feel that pain. My next blessing came in an acceptance letter notifying me as an I-Promise recipient.

I-Promise gave me and my mother that peace of mind that for the first time my main job was now to be a student. I was on a level playing field as the other students around me, no longer feeling financially inferior. I am proud to stand here and tell you that I am a double major graduate. Both majors completed with honors and a 3.7 GPA with law school as the next target. I don't share this to boast, I share this with you as a token of deep felt appreciation and to tell you that this was possible because of your help. One day I hope to be sitting on the opposite side of this table as a donor, listening to how the I-Promise changed the life of a student like myself with little in their pockets but a heavy desire to change the outcome of their story.