



LEADING BY EXAMPLE

STUDENT BODY PRESIDENT HELPED TO BUILD INCLUSIVENESS ON CAMPUS

The most powerful examples of leadership are found in the quiet, everyday acts that inspire others to live up to their greatest potential. After all, it takes courage to move away from your home and family in search of opportunity, and to reach outside of your comfort zone to make new friends.

That's exactly what Jason Chavez-Cruz '18 has done. As he has blazed new trails for himself and his family, he personifies a positive trend in the recruitment and retention of Latinx students that is making the campus a more diverse and welcoming place.

Jason's story is a testament to the power of the family you're born into, as well as the family you make.

Taking a leap

Jason's success at St. Scholastica inspired five of his relatives — many of whom attended Cristo Rey Jesuit High School in Minneapolis with him — to enroll as well. They include his brother, Bryan Chavez-Cruz, and cousins Josue Chino-Cruz, Allen Cruz, Lidia Angeles-Cruz and Chantell "Chanty" Armijo-Cruz.

It was a leap to come all the way north to Duluth from the Twin Cities area and Cristo Rey, where Latinx students are in the majority.

Chris Davila, director of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, said that just a few years ago, Latinx students represented one of the smallest minority populations on campus. In contrast, today they are the largest minority group at St. Scholastica, with a first-year retention rate higher than the average student.

"The increase in Latinx students has coincided with the Cruz family attending CSS," Davila said. "Not only are family members attending CSS, but other classmates from Cristo Rey High School are attending as well. They are finding a community

here that is supportive of their specific needs and a community they can relate to on a variety of levels."

"We are thankful to see the example of the Chavez-Cruz extended family," said President Colette Geary. "Their flourishing reflects our commitment to inclusive excellence and building a diverse and welcoming community."

Jason and his family, with the support and encouragement of Davila and his Student Affairs colleagues, have made a significant impact on campus. They've become leaders in social justice clubs and served on Student Senate, where they have helped to galvanize efforts such as the Swipe Out Hunger program, through which students can donate their unused meals to fellow students experiencing food insecurity, and the Professional Clothing Closet, which gathers donated gently used clothing items for students to use in job interviews.

Jason also served as student body president during his senior year. "The influence that this family has had on St. Scholastica is going to continue beyond the years of them being here," Davila said.

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Latinx is a gender-neutral term used in lieu of Latino/Latina.