



Wellesley's MassBay Student Named Goldwater Scholar

Wellesley — Kenny Moreno, a MassBay Community College senior studying Biotechnology, has been awarded the Barry M. Goldwater scholarship, which recognizes students for their outstanding work and future careers in mathematics,

engineering, and science.

Moreno, a 25-year-old Boston native, is one of the 282 recipients selected from 1,123 applicants, each of whom was

nominated by a faculty representative at their respective two- and four-year institutions. This scholarship, the premier undergraduate award in these fields, provides up to \$7,500 to recipients to cover future costs of tuition, fees, room and board, and books.

Being placed with a specific research project as soon as he began studying at MassBay, said Moreno, cultivated his interest in Biotechnology. For two years under the direction of his professor, Dr. Mario Raya, Moreno and a team examined the KRAS gene, which is over-expressed in the cells of pancreatic, non-small lung, and colorectal cancers, and is associated with a worse prognosis in patients.

“At first, it was just something I got stuck with, but after that I was very glad I got stuck with specifically that project. If it was up to me, I’d definitely continue doing research on it,” said Moreno.

After an unsuccessful first semester at Framingham State University, followed by four years of active duty in the Marine Corps that included two deployments to Iraq,

MassBay and the opportunities it provided were just what Moreno both wanted and needed.

Moreno began taking classes at MassBay to fulfill the 12-credit prerequisite for enrollment at UMass Boston, but quickly realized MassBay was the right fit for him.

“As I started taking more classes, and I got into the Biotechnology program, I realized that I liked the program, so I stayed for the whole two years. [At MassBay] there wasn’t any more pressure, in terms of how the military’s more of an intense atmosphere,” said Moreno with regard to the benefits of the flexible program.

Simultaneously taking classes and getting hands-on time in the lab from his first semester on gave Moreno a new level of experience and knowledge. Despite being a community college, the research conducted at MassBay prepares students for their future careers, said Raya.

“Most of the students have not been exposed to real work in the lab before. We try to give them a way to test if that’s really what they want to do, [so] we focus a lot on teaching students how to do research,” Raya said.

“It’s not just about emphasis on theory, or just emphasis on practice, but trying to maintain both at a very high level,” said Raya on the program, which is divided into Biotechnology, Marine Biotechnology, and Forensic DNA Science. Integrating theory and practice, while establishing a mentoring relationship between first- and second-year students, is what distinguishes the department, said Raya.

Moreno’s work at Boston University’s PROSTARS Research Program last summer impressed the faculty at MassBay, especially Dr. Bruce Jackson, chair of the Biotechnology Department. Moreno’s genetic research with the internship program, which gives students the opportunity to conduct interdisciplinary research in Physics, Chemistry, and Biology, is what led to his nomination for the Barry M. Goldwater scholarship.

Said Moreno, “I knew it was a prestigious award, so I was very honored for [Jackson] to nominate me.”

There still was the small matter of the application process, though, which Moreno worked on throughout this year.

“I had to answer a lot of questions, do a two-page research statement, and at the same time keep up with my classes and maintain my GPA,” said Moreno on the “very long process” of applying.

Before being officially awarded the scholarship, Moreno said he had an idea of his selection because of a text message from Jackson, who attended the scholarship committee meeting in Arizona.