

# August 15, 2011–Present News Archive, Southeast Missouri State University

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## Hispanic Twins Begin College Journey, Long-Time Dream

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by News Bureau on Thursday, Aug. 29, 2013



CAPE GIRARDEAU, Mo., Aug. 28, 2013 – Cristal and Jessica Osorio, twin sisters from Kansas City, Mo., began a new chapter at Southeast Missouri State University this week, fulfilling a long-time dream to pursue a college education.

After her first two days of classes, Cristal said, “I really like the theatre program. They get down to business.”

The sisters drove through the night Aug. 22 to arrive in time for new student move-in day last week at Southeast Missouri State University. The 350-mile trip to Cape Girardeau was well worth it and one they say they have been planning since the end of their sixth grade year.

The twins are participants in the Kauffman Scholars Program, a multi-year college access and scholarship program designed to help low-income urban students in Kansas City prepare for and complete a college education.

Launched by the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation in 2003, Kauffman Scholars provides support to students beginning in seventh grade and works with students until they complete their college education. Students receive extensive support from program leaders, coaches and collegiate, community and corporate partners throughout their years in the program.

Students selected for the program live within the boundaries of the Kansas City, Kan., or Kansas City, Mo., public school districts and attend a public or charter school in those districts.

Cristal and Jessica, both California natives, have been residents of Kansas City since they moved there at the age of six. The two are graduates of Southwest High School in Kansas City where they played soccer and were cheerleaders. Jessica also ran cross country. They have taken ballet and theatre classes, and dream of being on the stage or on television someday. The twins are both interested in a performing arts major, but have not yet decided whether to focus on theatre, vocal music or dancing.

"We are going to try it all," said Cristal, who is sharing a residence hall room in Dearmont Hall with her sister.

Through the Kauffman program, the twins have been working with a "coach" who introduced them to Southeast after she visited Southeast last fall. Their coach, they say, thought the River Campus, home to the Earl and Margie Holland School of Visual and Performing Arts, was a good "fit" for them.

Cristal and Jessica are part of a growing population of Hispanic students on campus at Southeast this fall. First-day Hispanic beginning freshmen enrollment grew from 27 last year to 37 this fall.

Trent Ball, associate dean of students and director of student retention at Southeast, said, "Southeast has moved itself to the forefront of embracing the importance of all of our students having a diverse experience both in the classroom and in co-curricular activities. We have made a concerted effort that all of our students have an opportunity to work in a diverse environment in the classroom and across the campus."

Ball acknowledges that while Southeast's Hispanic student enrollment is small, it continues to grow.

"We are taking steps to make this a campus that is inviting to Hispanic students,"

he said.

Ball says Southeast will engage in outreach efforts with the Hispanic Chambers of Commerce in St. Louis and Kansas City later this fall.

“Relationships like this one with the Kauffman Scholars are part of this outreach initiative,” he said.

The number of Hispanic public high school graduates is projected to more than double to 4,500 by 2024-2025 from about 1,600 in 2008-2009, said Dr. Debbie Below, vice president for enrollment management and student success and dean of students. In addition, Hispanic high school graduates are expected to increase to 7 percent of public graduates by 2027-2028 from three percent in 2008-2009.

Cristal says “it’s a really big deal” for her and her sister to attend college. They are the first in their family to pursue higher education, and they attribute their enrollment at Southeast this fall to the Kauffman program. The twins say their coach has worked with them during junior high and high school, teaching them how to write good essays, make a good first impression, dress for interviews and compose a resume. They will continue to get assistance from a Kauffman college coach at Southeast.

Kauffman coaches work with students in their junior high and high schools, during and after school. Students also work with their coaches during Saturday sessions and one-on-one meetings. Coaches develop personalized Individual Success Plans to guide each student toward the goal of college graduation.

Each coach supports individual students in preparing for success in high school, college, and careers. Coaches support students' academic needs, connect them with resources, provide college advising, and assist with selection of a best-fit post-secondary institution.

“It’s (the Kauffman program) a great opportunity,” Cristal said. “It has helped us get ready for college life.”

Without the Kauffman program, the twins say their family could have only financed a college education for one of them. The Osorios also have a younger sister, 15, and brother, 13.

“Education is important,” said Cristal. “My parents always wanted the best for us.”

But Jessica said, “I don’t think I would have had the money otherwise. We would have had to take out loans.”

The sisters are financing their education with Pell grants, College Access Partnership Awards (a Southeast Missouri State University performance-based grant awarded to students from Southeast's partnership with the Kauffman Scholars), Access Missouri Awards and tuition assistance from Kauffman.

On their first day on campus the twins were interviewed for the TRIO/Student Support Services program and met the staff of the Academic Support Centers (ASC). Southeast's partnership with the Kauffman Scholars began with the connection among TRIO, the Academic Support Centers and the executive director of the Kauffman Scholars, Jabari Turner.

Jessica and Cristal will be working closely with the TRIO and ASC staff to receive assistance in their transition to the University and to support them on the path to graduation. Both say they are looking forward to a successful college career at Southeast.

"I am very excited and nervous," Cristal said.

Jessica said she too is enthusiastic about the college experience -- "how much I will grow and all the things I will learn. I'm looking forward to it."

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