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## The College of Engineering Scholarship Fund Turns a Dream into a Reality

As a young girl growing up in Venezuela, neither the University of Miami nor an engineering degree was on the radar for Maria Villasmil (BSIE '16). But in 2005, the Villasmil family moved to Miami. It was the perfect place for the family to settle, enabling them to hold onto their Venezuelan roots while enjoying Miami's diversity of cultures. When she was in high school, Villasmil realized she had an aptitude for math and science – and thus began her dream of pursuing engineering at the University. A 'Canes fan throughout high school, she had her heart set on attending the College of Engineering.

Were it not for the "College of Engineering Scholarship Fund," though, Villasmil may never have had the chance to pursue her dream. The fund, made possible through support from alumni, parents and others, has benefited hundreds of engineering students since it was established 20 years ago. Maria Villasmil is one of them.

The responsibility to pay for college fell on the young Villasmil's shoulders, since her parents could not afford tuition. "Paying for school fell on me," she says. "I had a few scholarships and grants, but I also had to take out loans. Getting the scholarship helped me be less in debt."

At CoE, Villasmil's initial major was computer engineering. "It wasn't until I became aware of what Industrial Engineering was and what people in that field do, that I truly decided to go through my engineering career," she explains. "That's the degree I decided to pursue."

Villasmil was involved in multiple organizations and served as the Engineering Advisory Board (EAB) chair, a position equivalent to student body president, for a year. The College of Engineering's McArthur Engineering Building became her second home. Ann Helmers, EAB faculty advisor, stated, "I remember Maria talking about how deeply she appreciated the sacrifices her family had made for her to gain an education, and about how motivated she was to succeed as a professional engineer to in turn take care of them in the future. Her degree from the U was a family dream and her graduation was a day of joy for all."

Today, Villasmil works at Fort Lauderdale-based computer software giant Citrix, where she is part of a Leadership Development Program that includes "rotations" – training in various parts of the technical support business. She hopes to stay at Citrix, broadening and deepening her expertise. "I definitely enjoy working at Citrix, and hope to grow as an individual, learn the business to the point where I know how to make the best decisions to improve my work, and rise through the corporate ladder," she says. With every advancement, Villasmil has the *College of Engineering Scholarship Fund* to thank for putting her on this path.

As part of the celebration of the College of Engineering's 70th anniversary, alumnus Eric Cheng (BSBE '95, MSIE '01) is spearheading a unique 70 for 70 Giving Challenge, which asks CoE alumni and friends to give a total of \$35,000 in gifts or pledges to the "College of Engineering Scholarship Fund." Those gifts will be matched by \$35,000 in gifts from Cheng and his friends and fellow alumni Jackie Maestri (BSEE '85), her husband Hector Maestri (BSEE '84), Basil Khalil (BSIE '94, MSIE '97) and Amy Powers (BBA '93, MBA '97, MSTX '00).

To make a contribution online, please click [here](#). To make a gift by check, please make it payable to the "University of Miami" and indicate The College of Engineering Scholarship Fund on the memo line. Mail it to: Catarina Castruccio-Prince, Assistant Development Director, University of Miami, Newman Alumni Center, Suite 400, 6200 San Amaro Drive, Coral Gables, FL 33146.

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