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Learn and grow: Dilling Yang Staff Scholarship Program marks 20-year milestone

Teresa Curiel has always liked working with numbers.

“I love math and analyzing things – I always have,” she said.

Today Curiel is a general accountant in UC Santa Barbara’s Residential Operations, but she began her UCSB career as a custodian in 2007. At the time, she didn’t have the training for any of the accounting roles she aspired to. Financial support from [a Dilling Yang Staff Scholarship award](#) helped her get the training she needed for her current role.

For Curiel, a single mother of three who had arrived in the U.S. in 1995 — not speaking any English — financial help was key for career advancement training. After learning English and earning her associate’s degree in accounting at Santa Barbara City College, she transitioned from custodian to an administrative role in Residential Operations. Five years later, she was promoted to financial assistant. Then she applied for – and received – the Dilling Yang Scholarship award to help her pay for course fees for an accounting certification through UCSB’S Professional and Continuing Education (PaCE) division, once known as the UCSB Extension Program. Her department also helped cover some tuition.

“I was really honored and really happy to be a recipient,” said Curiel of the Dilling Yang award. “I learned about it from a co-worker and now I tell everyone about it.”

Designed specifically to support career staff earning less than \$85,000 annually who are seeking training and education, nearly 500 awards have been given out in its 20-year history, according to Melinda Crawford, who administers the program from the Office of Human Resources. “We started out with eight awards that first year. Since then, the program has provided critical support to many more staff looking to advance their careers and education,” she said. Several recipients have been repeat awardees – earning awards for multiple courses. Funds are used for UCSB’s academic and professional development opportunities such as PaCE, the Supervisory Certificate Program, or other professional development opportunities offered at UCSB. Over the years, some staffers have used the awards to pay for classes as they pursue their bachelor’s, master’s, and Ph.D. degrees.

In late summer, many of the awardees from over the years gathered for a special reception themed “Growing Together” at University House.

Angela Chikowero, an Open Access and Stem Librarian at the UCSB Library, took a turn at the microphone to express her “amazing thanks for Dilling” for the series of awards she received from the Dilling Yang Staff Scholarship program over three successive years.

“I simply needed to take more classes, acquire more skills... and grow in order to become a librarian,” she said.

Nick Alward-Saxon, executive assistant to the undergraduate dean of education and also attending the reception, said that he was awarded Dilling Yang funds in 2014 and used them to pay for UCSB’s Supervisory Certificate Program courses. “This helped me eventually complete the certificate,” he said, “developing many valuable skills and expanding my knowledge of campus structures, which supported my eventual transition to my current role.”

Dilling Yang, who exchanged hugs with many of the awardees, called it an “emotional moment.” She reiterated her commitment to UCSB’s staff, and praised them for their diligence in advancing their careers, and pursuing their academic dreams.

“I feel so proud and so happy to see everyone here. I am honored to bring you together to meet each other, and encourage each other, and make more colleagues aware of this scholarship opportunity,” she said.

“This scholarship symbolizes more than just financial support,” said Associate Vice Chancellor of Human Resources Ann-Marie Musto. “It represents our belief in the potential of our staff to help shape our future and help support the mission of UC Santa Barbara.” Musto also used the occasion to announce increased eligibility for the funds.

Meeting and interacting regularly with campus staff, Dilling Yang felt deeply how indispensable staff are in nurturing the living, learning, and working environment we enjoy on campus. Creating a scholarship fund to help staff advance their careers was a way to recognize and appreciate their invaluable contributions. For more than two decades, she has been devoted to growing the program and contributing annually to increase the scholarship fund and cover its staffing. The Dilling Yang Staff Scholarship is currently endowed at \$1.6 million and will continue in perpetuity.

Like Curiel, Chikowero would like more staff members on campus to know about the fund so they can pursue a journey of lifelong learning. “Through education we can achieve a lot...just don't be hindered by lack of funds. Look around,” she said. “There are resources out there that you might not be aware of. The Dilling Yang Staff Scholarship is a great one.”

[Guidelines and eligibility requirements](#) for the Dilling Yang Staff Scholarship program and a link to the application can be found [here](#).

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collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.