



## This is Posse at Pomona



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Members of the graduating Possee cohort, from top left: Jaureese Gaines, Dion Boyd. From bottom left: Vivian Carrillo, Maxine Solange Garcia, and Hannah Lea Doruelo (Not all members of Possee class of 2016 pictured).

**F**our years ago, Jaureese Gaines '16 went back home to Chicago during winter break to make a decision that would ultimately change the course of his young adult life.

He had just finished his first semester at Pomona College, having dedicated 20-30 hours a week to football, and enrolled in courses that tested his writing, Gaines ended up with a low G.P.A. and a notice of academic probation hanging over his head.

The news was hard to swallow for the high school valedictorian who had been selected a finalist for the [Posse Foundation scholarship](http://www.possefoundation.org) (<http://www.possefoundation.org>). Back home on break, Gaines asked himself the difficult question, “Do I belong at Pomona?”

“I could just go to the University of Illinois and most likely do better there, but I really looked at myself then [thought] ‘what would I be saying to other students in my shoes, if I were to just give up and take an easy way out?’ So I told myself, ‘I’m going to go back and make the most of this opportunity.’ I feel it is my duty to provide an example for students who come from the same area as me: ‘if I can do it, so can you.’”

With help from the [Writing Center](http://www.pomona.edu/administration/writing-center) (<http://www.pomona.edu/administration/writing-center>), support from his professors and by adopting better study habits, Gaines pulled through and is now graduating with a solid G.P.A. He has three summer internships in Washington, D.C. under his belt, and is going back to Chicago to work on education equity access to help other youth from his hometown.

Gaines credits part of his decision to come back to Pomona to not wanting to be the student who dropped out and broke up the Posse group – a cohort of 10 students from Chicago urban high schools, and he says, to the support of his Posse faculty mentor, Psychology Professor Eric Hurley.

The Posse Foundation's partnership with Pomona started in 2005 when the first cohort came to campus. Posse selects 10 high school students for each partner college who become each other's support system. Each cohort is assigned a faculty mentor, like Professor Hurley who mentors Gaines's group. Faculty mentors meet every two weeks with each student, and weekly with the entire group for the first two years of college. In addition, Posse staff members visit the college four times a year to meet with Posse Scholars, campus liaisons and mentors. Currently, there are 50 Posse Scholars on campus, four groups from Chicago and one from Miami.

The relationships built in Posse are as strong as those of any family, says Gaines, and his fellow Posse members echo the sentiment.

Although Maxine Solange Garcia '16, a neuroscience major with two research internships at Tuft's University and Johns Hopkins University, is busy planning her post-Pomona plans that include more research, travel abroad and medical school, she knows she will always have her Posse family to count on.

Garcia considers the other women in her Posse cohort her closest friends and sisters, and the men as her brothers. "It's been an amazing experience, definitely a family that I'll have for life."

During her first year, most of the students in her residence hall group came from an upper class and suburban background. "Coming from Chicago and being a minority student in more ways than one, I felt awkward in the space at Pomona," she says but luckily, her Posse family was there to support her.

"We spent a lot of time before we came to Pomona discussing our family lives, our goals, our dreams, forming these really strong bonds with one another. It was because I could talk about my experiences on campus with them that they could empathize with me and share their experiences too, making my experience at Pomona a positive one."

Dion Boyd '16 agrees. "We come from a place that is extremely different from here, in every sense of the word. But, we are extremely close, we love our mentor Eric Hurley and we love

each other,” says Boyd.

An economics major, Boyd has two Bank of America summer internships on his resume thanks to Posse’s Career Program, an added resource to all Posse Scholars to help them gain real-world experience while in college and beyond. After two summers of hard work, Boyd has secured a job with the company’s corporate banking division after graduation.

Hannah Lea Doruelo ’16 credits Posse’s mission and the people behind it for the program’s success.

“Posse is super radical because it acknowledges barriers to education that many communities face. The actual interview process is an intervention of these larger systems that create structural barriers to education. The people who tend to staff Posse, in Chicago, understand that education can be a means of mobility, not just individual mobility but also community uplift.”

Professor Hurley, the Posse faculty mentor for the graduating cohort, is one of the people behind the success of the program; part of his job is to make sure students know they do indeed belong at Pomona.

“At any given time there are about 40 Posse students on campus,” says Hurley. “All of them bring new perspectives to the campus and all bring a desire to lead and shape it. It’s enriching.”

He says, “I can’t think of one of them who isn’t doing something to shape a better world and a more inclusive campus.”

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