

GARY LAWSON



Claudio Ferrer worked his way through a life of struggles to graduate with two bachelor's degrees in May.

# CHALLENGED TO ACHIEVE

**Claudio Ferrer stays on track to succeed  
at OSU despite a life of detours**

BY JOHN HELSLEY





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“It’s always great to encourage someone and see them succeed. I figure if you have knowledge, somebody shared it with you. Why not share it with somebody else?”

— CLAUDIO FERRER

Claudio Ferrer found easy motivation to rise early and get to school at Enid High School in northern Oklahoma.

“If I could be honest, there were two free meals at school every day,” said Ferrer, a recent graduate of Oklahoma State University’s Spears School of Business. “So Monday through Friday, I ate well.

“That was really a driving force to get up early in the morning.”

Ferrer’s life involved such struggles as frequent moves, including a first uprooting away from his native Puerto Rico, periods spent homeless and a pressing need for him to enter the workforce at the age of 13.

“I had a job at McDonald’s in high school, which at times was the major source of income in our family,” he said.

Life remains complicated for Ferrer, although this time by choice. And he remains highly motivated to hit campus daily — only now his motive is to feed his intense appetite for learning and thriving in the classroom.

There have been more awards and honors and regular spots on the dean’s and president’s honor rolls, along with various service projects, such as with the Barbara Bush Houston Literacy Foundation.

“I am inspired by Claudio and his success, given all of his challenges,” said Betty Simkins, head of the Department of Finance.

The challenges, while serious, never became barricades for Ferrer. Detours, yes, beginning when his parents divorced

in Puerto Rico, prompting a move with his mother to the U.S. mainland.

“There was a lot of moving in my childhood, a lot of different cities and houses,” Ferrer said. “Through economic toughness, I was homeless some of my childhood. I remember wearing the same shirt every day to school.”

Still, he was going to school every day. And while there, he was listening. And learning. And developing.

Ferrer ranked fifth in a graduating class of 400 at Enid High, yet his concept of college was at best lacking.

“I did not have a real good grasp of what college was, or how you would afford it,” he said.

So Ferrer kept his job at McDonald’s, where he’d worked for two years as a cashier and managing the front of the restaurant, until one day his mother suggested he look into possible opportunities at Enid’s branch of Northern Oklahoma

### THE CLAUDIO FERRER SUCCESS STORY

- » Outstanding Senior, OSU Alumni Association
- » Graduated in May with two bachelor’s degrees — one in finance with a minor in accounting and another in economics with a concentration in quantitative studies.
- » Senior of Significance, 2017-18.
- » SHIELD Scholar.
- » Economics Society Student of the Year, 2016-17.
- » Economics Society president and treasurer, 2015-present.
- » Member of Net Impact, Free Enterprise Society, Financial Management Association, Hispanic Student Association, Math Club, History Club and Business News Club.
- » On-campus jobs with the Office of Institutional Diversity and TRiO.
- » Internships served with Phillips 66 in Houston and First United Bank in Durant, Oklahoma

College. He enrolled in a rush, three weeks before school started. A year later, he had completed an associate degree and was named the school’s Accounting Student of the Year.

But again, Ferrer didn’t know what was next. Until ...

“I had a little orange envelope at home,” Ferrer said of the recruitment letter from OSU that changed his course for the better.

And Ferrer just keeps making it better, through excelling in classes and activities, and in giving back, especially through his work in the Office of Institutional Diversity.

“That’s obviously very close to my heart,” Ferrer said.

And he’s more than willing to share his story.

“Not just share my story in general,” he said, “but if they’re going through

*continues*



something, whether it's financial, social or just getting adjusted to a new environment, I share some specific instances and say, 'I've been through this, too. I'm here at sort of the end of the journey and you'll be able to get there as well.'

"It's always great to encourage someone and see them succeed. I figure if you have knowledge, somebody shared it with you. Why not share it with somebody else?"

There's not much Ferrer can't relate to, from his earliest days until now. While his current issues don't rival the earlier struggles of his life such as two-mile walks to and from school on an often-hungry belly, he has faced trying times at OSU.

When in doubt, Ferrer knows where to turn, and his mother, Nilka Ramirez, is always ready with support.

"Somebody who's been my anchor my

**"Whatever my next step is, it's good to know this institution is behind me."**

— CLAUDIO FERRER

entire life, when there wasn't much money or jobs or even a house to live in, my mom has always given me love," he said. "And she always pushed me to get up and go to school and study. She tried to raise me to have a better life than what she was having.

"So I'm really thankful for my mom, for everything she's done in my life and putting that drive in me even more in really bad situations."

Sometimes still, Mom has to reinforce that drive.

"There's been some tough nights at the library, pulling all-nighters studying," Ferrer said, "I'd give her a call and she's always told me, 'Do what you've got to do, but don't come back here.'

"I know she says it from a good place."

Not that Ferrer would ever abandon his journey, not with five younger brothers watching him back home in Enid.

"Throughout my life, I haven't always had role models to look up to or mentorship," he said. "I always think everything I do, I make sure they see it in a good light and they think, 'Man, I could do that, too. My brother did it. I'll be able to do it.'

"I'm always pushing them. Whenever I give them gifts, they get algebra books or educational books, or books about the planets for my younger brothers. I always try to teach them that education can take them a long way."

And there's no greater example than their big brother. For that, Ramirez is thankful.

"I thank God for my Claudio Jonathan," she said. "A young fighter, exceptional as a son and an example of discipline for his

JORDAN BENSON



BUSINESS

The Seniors of Significance Award may very well be the highlight of Ferrer's academic career. The award recognizes students who have excelled in scholarship, leadership and service to campus and community and have brought distinction to OSU.

That good news came via a phone call, with Ferrer enjoying a break from classes.

"I was alone in my apartment, so I had no shame in screaming and jumping with joy," he said. "Not only the significance of it, but coming to the end of the journey, it means a lot to say, 'OK, whatever my next step is, it's good to know this institution is behind me, and this institution sort of believes in what I'm going to accomplish.'"

Considering all that Ferrer has already accomplished, there's plenty of reason to believe. He's quick to thank all who have helped in guiding him at OSU and to



Ferrer has achieved a considerable list of successes at OSU.

brothers. A young man committed to succeed and who has been able to take every obstacle in his life as an opportunity to continue growing and maturing."

Once professor Simkins learned Ferrer's story, she happily wrote a letter of recommendation to the Seniors of Significance Award committee.

"I never knew how hard he worked and what he had overcome," Simkins said. "And he never mentioned these things. A very positive guy. He is so polished and professional, too. I am so proud of him.

"I cannot say enough good words about him. His path was so much tougher than most students and he still landed at the top. This is my 21st year at OSU, and I do not see many students like Claudio."

express his gratitude for the opportunities the school has provided.

He's not yet sure what's next but he knows he has options — the kind of options that never seemed real just a few years ago.

"Honestly, I didn't really see the future," Ferrer said. "If you would have asked me, 'What are you going to do in five years?' I would have thought, 'The same thing I'm doing now.' I didn't see change as possible. I didn't see the possibility to improve my life or to move forward in life.

"Coming here, I've had two internships. I've been blessed. Every time I start a new course, I'm glad to be learning and to know all that exists out there. There are fields I can enjoy, things I didn't know existed." @