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A Posse Comes East: Houstonians Share Tight Bond and a New World

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JoJo Parker '18 could have gone to Texas A&M or UT Austin, popular destinations for high-achieving students from Houston. But she chose Colby. "My mom was definitely worried, but I wanted to get away so badly," she said. "I needed to experience a part of the U.S. that was very different from where I lived."

For Parker and other members of the Houston Posse, coming to Mayflower Hill meant leaving a sprawling metropolis and one of the most diverse cities in the United States. “If you took New York City and just spread it out more, that’s Houston,” Parker said.

Parker is one of nine students in Colby Posse 13, the first group of students from Houston to attend Colby through the Posse Foundation after a 12-year

A Posse Comes East

HOUSTONIANS SHARE TIGHT BOND AND A NEW WORLD

By Christina Dong '17



Members of Posse 13, all members of the Class of 2018 from Houston, Texas: from left, front row, Samuel Robles, Molly Wu, Marlen Guerrero; back row, Hermela Woldehazariat, Graciela Lopez, Daphne Hernandez, JoJo Parker, Blair Dixon, and James Gonzalez.

affiliation with Posse New York. Posse recruits high-achieving public high school students and offers an opportunity to attend a partner college or university with support of a full-tuition scholarship and fellow Posse scholars.

Bonded even before setting out for Colby together, the Posse meets weekly with

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its mentor, Associate Professor of Biology Lynn Hannum. “It’s a way of, after you’ve been out of your comfort zone for so long, being able to go back into your comfort zone and be with people you feel like understand you,” Parker said.

Sometimes it’s just a matter of getting together and talking about home—what they miss about it. And food is often at the top of the list. Parker even creates her own list of favorite

Students and Posse mentor Joe Atkins. In the next 20 years, Atkins said, the college-age population in New England is predicted to decrease by 30 percent, while in the South, that group is expected to increase by even more. Houston is now a “majority minority” city as well—almost equal parts white, black, and Latino.

Given Maine’s radically different racial demographic and climate, Posse scholar Marlen Guerrero ’18 expected

Lopez explained to her friends and family that, though Colby is in Maine, her liberal arts education and networking opportunities would have global reach. Interested in public service since high school, Lopez now focuses on human development through her major in Latin American studies and minor in education and her work with the Association for the Advancement of Mexican Americans.

Parker, an aspiring writer, is an American studies major with a minor in creative writing. She discovered American studies through the New York: Modern Global City three-course cluster her first semester at Colby. “[The major] was everything I was interested in and nothing I wasn’t interested in,” she said.

Guerrero, a biology-neuroscience major with a minor in sociology, became interested in public health after coming to Colby and finding more fields that combine her interests.

Daphne Hernandez ’18 is pursuing an East Asian studies major and art minor and will be studying in Japan next year. “Just being here is a huge thing for me,” said Hernandez, a first-generation college student. “For many other families, it’s [just] going to college. For my family it was a big deal.”

That big step, for Hernandez and her fellow Posse scholars, comes with a home base. The group isn’t just close as a whole—Lopez feels she has a relationship with each person. “Knowing that we’re all trying to figure it out together kind of gives you some confidence.”

Already acting as mentors to this year’s Posse 14, also from Houston, these members of Posse 13 are taking full advantage of their Maine adventure. Lopez wants to practice skiing as much as she can, and she vows to never miss an apple-picking season—things she can’t do back home.

“Coming here,” Lopez said, “I gained having two separate worlds.”



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—Daphne Hernandez ’18

dishes and shares it with her mom in preparation for her visits home.

Posse 13, as it’s known, is part of a dramatically increased Colby presence in the South and Southwest. “New England is getting older; the South and the Southwest are getting younger,” said Assistant Dean of

to go out of her comfort zone in a way she never had before. At the same time, Posse made the move less intimidating for her and the others. Said Graciela Lopez ’18, “I knew that, if my Posse was there with me, I could learn to [navigate] anything.”