

## Educator Leonor Blum Recognized for Helping Latina Students Succeed

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Leonor Blum: "I want our students to have better lives than their parents, who are living hand-to-mouth and really sacrificing."  
(Wide Angle Youth Media)

As a student at Wellesley College in Massachusetts, Leonor Blum, a native of Argentina, struggled with adapting to a new culture and a new way of learning.

"I attended a bilingual school in Buenos Aires, so English wasn't a problem," she says. "But in the U.S., you had to write essays and speak up in class, and I was not used to that. It was quite a challenge for the international students, and no one was there to help.

"During those first two years, I felt lost and inferior and believed I would never make it."

But Blum persevered, earning a bachelor's degree as well as master's degrees from the Columbia University School of Journalism and the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies.

Today, Blum is the founder and director of ¡Adelante Latina!, a free afterschool academic enrichment and college preparatory program for underprivileged and promising Latina sophomores attending Baltimore City public high schools.

A Baltimore Hebrew congregant who lives in Cheswolde, Blum is among 10 semi-finalists for the 2019 "Homecoming Hero Awards." Presented by the nonprofit Baltimore Homecoming Inc., the awards pay tribute to communal and nonprofit leaders, activists, artists and innovators making an impact. Five winners will be announced on Oct. 14.

"My organization is the only one of the semi-finalists that works with Latinos," says Blum. "Latinos are becoming the largest minority population nationwide, and it's about time they get recognition and support."

A wife, mother and grandmother, Blum, 73, founded ¡Adelante Latina! in 2013 after working for three decades as a history and political science professor at Notre Dame of Maryland University. She says she decided to spend her retirement years helping teenage Latinas be better prepared for American collegiate life than she was. Located at Archbishop Borders School in Highlandtown, the nonprofit focuses on increasing cultural awareness and improving vocabulary, reading comprehension and essay writing.

With a staff of three English teachers, two math tutors, two math SAT instructors, a chemistry tutor, a program coordinator and an office assistant — as well as 32 volunteer tutors and substitutes, — ¡Adelante Latina! offers math and science support, provides SAT preparation, assists with college and scholarship applications, teaches interview skills and places students in paid summer internships.

Beyond the classroom, students have the opportunity to attend theater, museum and symphony outings, as well as a weeklong “College Boot Camp” at Notre Dame.

Those who complete all three years of the program and enroll in college receive a \$3,000 scholarship. ¡Adelante Latina! is funded through private donations, family foundations and organizational grants.

“I don’t know where I’d be without ¡Adelante Latina!, which was like the master door to many opportunities that have helped me grow,” says Jessica Marquez-Membreno, a Grinnell College junior majoring in psychology and the classics.

Says Evelyn Quintero, a Towson University sophomore majoring in nursing: “Through ¡Adelante Latina! I found my voice and confidence as a writer and learned it’s OK to ask for help. It taught me to be more open and broaden my horizons as to what’s out there for me. Whatever I put my mind to, I can achieve.”

A 2018 finalist for the National Excelencia in Education Award, ¡Adelante Latina! has been honored by the Latino Providers Network and the Ole! Group at Exelon.

“I can’t say enough about this wonderful program,” says Dr. John Sinnigen, a retired UMBC Spanish and intercultural communications professor who tutors for ¡Adelante Latina! “In addition to improving language skills, it offers confidence building. ... Leonor Blum is an incredibly intelligent, caring and totally engaged director who knows what’s going on with each and every student, even after they’ve graduated. She really is a role model.”

Every year, ¡Adelante Latina! works with an average of 36 students, with 100 percent of its graduates gaining admission to colleges.

“It’s rewarding to see these girls get accepted into college, and I’m especially pleased when they choose a liberal arts major like I did,” Blum says.

As the organization’s executive director, Blum divides her time between program management, fund-raising and one-on-one tutoring. She also steps in to teach group classes when needed.

“I want our students to have better lives than their parents, who are living hand-to-mouth and really sacrificing,” she says.

Marquez-Membreno says Blum is fully deserving of the “Hometown Hero Award.”

“¡Adelante Latina! provided me with so much support, and Ms. Blum was the backbone,” she says.

“As my personal mentor and tutor, she helped me prepare for college, as well as my French studies, the International Baccalaureate history exam and the MERIT Health Leadership Academy application.

“She continues to be there for me, and now is helping with my study abroad essay,” Marquez-Membreno says. “I am so grateful to her.”

*For information, visit [adelantelatinabaltimore.org](http://adelantelatinabaltimore.org). For information about the Hometown Hero Award, visit [baltimorehomecoming.com/heroes/](http://baltimorehomecoming.com/heroes/).*

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