

RETHINKING EDUCATION

Chicago police officer Daniel Gonzalez is pursuing his BA through SCPS's program with the Fraternal Order of Police and the Chicago Police Department

Daniel Gonzalez is on a quest for knowledge.

The 35-year-old Chicago police officer, who is pursuing his BA through SCPS, in partnership with the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) and the Chicago Police Department, credits DePaul with helping him pursue his love of learning.

"Everyone says you can't stop learning, which I am realizing is really true, especially now that I'm at DePaul," says Gonzalez, who completes the program this year.

Gonzalez grew up in the Gage Park neighborhood of Chicago, one of four children of parents who were born in Mexico.

After high school, he started working as an automotive technician. It didn't take long for him to pursue welder and electrician certifications, which enabled him to become a vehicle upfitter. While working on police vehicles for the city, he started interacting with Chicago cops. He found himself bitten by the law enforcement bug.

"I kind of got my foot in the water by talking with other people in law enforcement and hearing their stories," he says.

In 2010, Gonzalez began working as a correctional officer at Cook County Jail. A couple of years later, he decided he wanted to apply for a supervisory position within the jail or a patrol position outside

of the jail. The only catch was that he needed an associate degree.

"That is actually when I realized that a school diploma is important," he says.

In 2015, he received his associate degree from Moraine Valley Community College and realized his ambition to become a patrol officer. A year later, he qualified as a Chicago police officer. These days, he works the 12th District, a broad stretch on the southwest side of the city.

"I like that every day is not the same," says Gonzalez about a beat that includes everything from police investigations to community interactions.

Through a fellow officer who was in the first SCPS/FOP cohort, Gonzalez heard about the DePaul program.

It's been a demanding two years, but

Gonzalez has been able to translate so much of what he's learned in the classroom to his work on the street—from HR protocols to project management skills.

He's also learned the importance of self-care.

"One thing we learned that has really stuck with me is that if you fall down and hurt your knee, you go to the doctor. But when a police officer suffers traumatic incidents, not many go to a doctor or talk about it. As police officers, we have to remind ourselves that we are human beings first," he says.

In the meantime, Gonzalez is grateful to DePaul for his unique educational experience.

"I take pride in being a DePaul student," he says. "Not only has it helped me personally, but it's helped me be a better police officer and given me a bigger network where we can help each other."

