

NMICC

New Mexico Independent Community Colleges



The Road to Success Starts at a New Mexico Community College

While the myriad success stories that come out of New Mexico's independent community colleges are as unique and varied as the students who tell them, the underlying message heard throughout is the same:

The Road to Success Starts at a New Mexico Community College



Shannon Tafoya

Associate of Applied Science
Northern New Mexico College

Shannon Tafoya earned an Associate's degree in massage therapy at Northern New Mexico College and is now working towards a Bachelor's degree in integrative health studies at NNMC, while working full-time as the Health Occupations Department Secretary. Like many typical NNMC students, she balances a full-time academic life with a full-time job.

However, in other respects, Shannon is far from typical. A year ago, she began making payroll deductions to donate a portion of her income to the NNMC Foundation, which provides scholarship funds for Northern students. "As a staff member and a student at the college, I see and feel the financial needs of the students, and I wanted to give back" she says. "That is why I chose to start donating to the Foundation in 2008 and why I am increasing the amount of my donation. I am investing in the future of northern New Mexico and that feels good."

Although born in Rhode Island, where her parents were serving in the US Navy, Shanon Tafoya can trace her roots in northern New Mexico to the late 1500's. She chose to return to New Mexico and now lives in Española.

NORTHERNNEWMEIXICOCOLLEGE



Angelica Carrillo

Associate's Degree in Liberal Studies
Western New Mexico University

Last spring, Angelica Carrillo earned a high school diploma from Silver High School and her AA degree in liberal studies from Western New Mexico University. She is the first student in Silver High School history to accomplish this feat.

Angelica spent her sophomore, junior, and senior high school years as a dual credit college student, all the while keeping up with her high school extra-curricular activities. She was captain of her high school's cheerleading squad, a member of the National Honor Society, vice-president of the student council, and member of the high school golf team. Carrillo enrolled as a full time student at WNMU during her final semester taking four college courses. She earned a 3.8 grade point average (GPA) at WNMU and a 3.65 GPA at Silver High.

"I knew it was always a possibility [to graduate]," said Carrillo. "It was my dad who pushed me to do it." While other high school students would comment that they had too much on their plate, Carrillo would respond, "I'm going to two schools."

Angelica has been admitted to Arizona State University where she will study pre-medicine. A Red Sox fan, she intends to become an anesthesiologist and move to Boston.

WESTERNNEWMEIXICOUNIVERSITY



Justin Hunt

Associate of Arts, San Juan College
Bachelor of Arts in Communications, Mesa State College

After earning an Associate of Arts degree from San Juan College in 1997, Hunt transferred to Mesa State College in Grand Junction, where he majored in communications. From there, Hunt began a career in television broadcasting. From 1999 to 2003, he worked in Farmington and Roswell as a television news reporter, being honored three times as the New Mexico Broadcast Association (NMBA) Large Market News Reporter of the year.

"What I really loved about reporting was taking sounds and pictures and making a story out of them," he says. "However, one of my mentors, former photography instructor Jim Burgess, taught me how to be passionate about a shot. I found that passion was quickly returning, as I wanted to tell stories from behind the camera instead of in front of it."

Among many other projects, Hunt completed a film titled *Meth Monster*, a documentary about the methamphetamine issues in San Juan County. Not long thereafter, Hunt found himself traveling to Oregon, Wyoming and Montana. With only one camera in tow, Hunt found his reporter skills coming into play as he filmed, wrote, directed, produced and edited *American Meth*, a documentary narrated by Val Kilmer about a young family's daily struggle with the drug, as well as the challenges and devastation it creates in other communities.

Hunt brought the film home to debut in the Henderson Fine Arts Center on March 2, 2007. More than 1,000 people came to see his first feature-length effort, which spawned an amazing run over the next year. *American Meth* was shown at dozens of film festivals in the United States and throughout the world. The film has since sold more than 35,000 DVD copies and was one of the most rented documentaries of 2008.

Since then, Hunt has joined the staff of the Durango Independent Film Festival, the Santa Fe Film Festival, and the Albuquerque Film Festival as the panel coordinator. Justin's latest film, *Absent*, a documentary about the impact of the father figure, is currently in post-production and will be released in 2010.

"This has been an amazing ride, with a lot of exciting ventures ahead," Hunt says. "I must say, I truly believe that there's no way I could have accomplished all that I have without first building that foundation at San Juan College. Serving as Associated Student president I learned leadership. It was at SJC that I gained the confidence to succeed, while the professors cultivated ambition. This is a fantastic organization."

SAN JUAN COLLEGE



Caitlin O'Grady

Associate Degree in Engineering
Central New Mexico Community College

By taking advantage of CNM's high school dual credit program, which allows high school students to earn college and high school credits simultaneously, Caitlin O'Grady was able to graduate in spring 2009 with not only a diploma from Sandia High School in hand, but also a CNM associate's degree in engineering.

Now, she's an 18-year-old at the University of New Mexico double-majoring in nuclear and chemical engineering, with enough transferred credits to be a junior. Not only is she ahead of the curve as a college student, but she also saved more than \$10,000 in tuition by taking freshman and sophomore level college classes through the dual credit program.

"I was the first person to graduate from CNM with an engineering degree before finishing high school, and I did it with honors," said O'Grady. "It was a difficult achievement, but one that I earned through hard work and dedication. The other intangible rewards that came from all of my hard work are that I'm two years ahead of my peers; I understand the college and university settings now; I know that I will be successful in college; and I am able to double-major in two engineering disciplines that will further my career and educational goals."

CENTRAL NEW MEXICO COMMUNITY COLLEGE



Dan Koleski

Associate of Applied Science Degree
Mesalands Community College

Bachelor of Information Technology
American InterContinental University

IT Manager, New Mexico Higher Education Department
Santa Fe, New Mexico

"I completely give Mesalands Community College credit for completing my associate's degree and laying the foundation for the next step towards a bachelor's. The staff at Mesalands gave me the opportunity to explore new ideas for a career in the computer sciences and helped me launch a successful career.

I am appreciative to Mesalands for helping me achieve my goals. At first I was hesitant to resume college as an older student. Dr. David Gallatin, Dean of Administrative Services, encouraged me not to view age as an obstacle and to continue pursuing a necessary career change. Frankly, without his motivation, I don't think I would have even begun, let alone finished, college."

MESALANDS COMMUNITY COLLEGE



Carlos Balladares

Associate of Arts - Human Services
Santa Fe Community College

Bachelor of Social Work
New Mexico Highlands University

Case Manager with New Mexico Young Fathers Project
Santa Fe, New Mexico

Carlos Balladares can relate with many of the young fathers he mentors daily during his job as a case manager with New Mexico Young Fathers Project, a non-profit organization assisting young families and fathers with a wide range of services. A father of three, Balladares knows firsthand the challenges that come with early parenthood. "I became a dad when I was still a teenager and I can relate to the confusion and challenges of these young fathers," Balladares said. "But I learned as a student at SFCC, that I could combine these personal experiences with my college education in order to create opportunity."

Balladares graduated from SFCC with an associate degree in social services in 2006 and is now pursuing a dual master's degree at New Mexico Highlands University. Balladares plans to run his own site for the Young Fathers Project in Northern New Mexico, where services are limited, he said. "I've always looked at my college education in two different ways," he said. "College helps me grow as a professional and provide for my own family and it allows me to better serve young fathers and their families, who need support."

SANTAFECOMMUNITYCOLLEGE



Dana Davis

Associate of Science
New Mexico Junior College

Bachelor of Science, Electrical Engineering
New Mexico State University

Master of Science, Electrical Engineering
New Mexico State University

Computer Hardware Engineer, Sandia National Laboratories

"I received a great education at NMJC. The classes were smaller than university courses, and the professors truly wanted to see their students understand and succeed.

I was able to transfer to New Mexico State University with an Associate degree and all of my basic courses under my belt. I jumped right into their engineering curriculum without missing a beat. I was not only able to keep up with the other engineering students, but often felt like I had an advantage because of the strong math and science instruction I had received at NMJC."

NEWMEXICOUNIJCOLLEGE



Amanda Drake Gonzales

Cosmetology Letter of Qualification
Clovis Community College

Amanda Drake Gonzales enrolled in Cosmetology courses as a dual credit student during her senior year at Clovis High School. The fall following high school graduation, Amanda became a full-time student in Cosmetology. In December of 2005 Amanda was awarded a Letter of Qualification in Cosmetology and took the New Mexico licensure exams. She opened her own shop, The Beauty Bar, in January of 2006. She expanded her business to include three other cosmetologists who rented booths from her.

In summer of 2008, Amanda's mother, Linda Drake, enrolled in the first Esthetician training courses offered at Clovis Community College. Linda completed the esthetics courses in July 2009 and became licensed as an esthetician. Amanda remodeled her salon to accommodate Linda's esthetics services and now they are in business together.

CLOVISCOMMUNITYCOLLEGE



Patricia Tapia

Associate of Arts in Teacher Education
Luna Community College

Life hasn't been easy for Patricia Tapia. But like a steady stream, hope and ambition flows from her heart. Tapia, 45, recently graduated with an AA degree in teacher education from Luna Community College. And it was with courageous determination that she was able to accomplish this goal. Patricia suffers from diabetes and high blood pressure and is blind from her right eye. "I've been going to Luna Community College off-and-on for the last four years," said Tapia. "It was really difficult for me, working full time and not being able to read the words in a textbook because of my eyesight.

Tapia graduated with several dozen family members in attendance. "It was important, especially for my nieces and nephews to see if I could go to school and do well, they could to. I want to be a role model for them. I tell them all the time that it's important to get an education, because without one they're never going to get a good job," says Patricia.

Her AA degree could very well be the beginning of one of Patricia's dreams—to someday have her own elementary classroom. Should her next operation be successful and if her eyesight improves, she intends to earn a BA in education from Highlands.

LUNACOMMUNITYCOLLEGE

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CLOVIS COMMUNITY COLLEGE clovis.edu
LUNA COMMUNITY COLLEGE luna.edu
MESALANDS COMMUNITY COLLEGE mesalands.edu
NEW MEXICO JUNIOR COLLEGE nmjc.edu
NORTHERN NEW MEXICO COLLEGE nnmc.edu
SAN JUAN COLLEGE sanjuancollege.edu
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