

How is your community college experience preparing you... To achieve a meaningful career with which you can support yourself and your family?

As a high school student graduating community college on Mar 3rd, 2024, my journey hasn't been easy. But, thanks to South Texas College, I have a better chance at a bright future where I can get my dream career. A career that, while rewarding, also serves as a testament to my unwavering commitment. Aerospace engineering can give me and my family the means to support ourselves in this ever-advancing world.

Let's rewind a little. I was born in Mission, Texas, on November 18, 2005. However, due to circumstances, I had to stay and live with my parents in Mexico. Initially, they were planning to send me to live with my grandparents in the US; however, my grandparents already housed my older brothers, and since they lived in an apartment, there wasn't enough space for another child. Thus, I had no option but to stay. When I was younger, I could not see the unfairness of attending a poor school in Mexico while my brothers enjoyed a great education in the US. Some of my elementary experiences involve eating under one of those metal roofs that are placed over a sports court. Those kinds of roofs always have bird nests, so it wasn't uncommon for some twigs to fall into some unfortunate kid's plate, as we did not have a dining room back when I was attending. I could go on and on speaking about the difficulties of my situation: unsanitary restrooms without toilet paper, having to pay for food, having to provide copy paper for assignments, etcetera. Regardless, my parents pushed me to be nothing but the best, so I made sure to excel in my studies. These challenges made education all the more valuable to me. They have taught me to take advantage of any educational opportunity that I have, because those are rare, and oftentimes if you miss them you will regret it.

By the time I was in 6th grade, I had begged my parents to enroll me in a US middle school, to which they agreed. And let me tell you, I was so very nervous on my first day. That anxiety that coursed through my veins did not allow me to have a stellar academic performance by my standards. That, and the fact that I did not understand the coursework they gave me since it was vastly different from the teaching methods used in Mexico. Needless to say, I failed my Reading STAAR exam. Those years passed by so quickly that most of my memories are a bit blurry now. I remember that I was a UIL State Qualifier, I was also a STARR County Fair Winner, both in scrapbooking and art sections. Then, COVID struck during the second half of my 8th-grade year. Shortly before that though, I remember my math teachers telling me that I should pass my TSI as soon as I joined High School. At the time I didn't understand why and the explanation they gave me was sort of confusing. All I understood was that it would be beneficial for me in the long run. Anyway, a few months later, COVID struck and the "breaks" began. The "breaks" turned into quarantine, and regular classes turned to online classes. Those days lasted until my freshman year of high school.

My freshman days were quite bleak; I just went through the motions every day. However, I did win a Superintendent Essay Contest, so there's that. It wasn't until halfway through the year that I remembered my teachers' advice to "pass my TSI as soon as possible." I'm ashamed to admit that I did not heed their advice until my sophomore year. By then, I understood that passing this exam determined whether you were "college ready," which in turn allowed you to take Dual Enrollment classes. I'm proud to say that I passed all sections of this exam on my first try, even managing to get a perfect score in the math section. This allowed me to sign up for many helpful college classes, one of them being my Precision Metal Manufacturing Dual Enrollment class. Basically, this program consists of 8 college classes compacted into a 2-period high school class over the course of the junior and senior years. Initially wary about joining because it was a metal manufacturing class, not what I was planning to major in, I ended up enrolling due to the lack of financial backup for college.

This class includes courses such as Blueprint Reading and Sketching, Basic Machine Shop I, Intermediate Machining I, Precision Tools and Measurements, Drafting for Specific Occupations, Machine Shop Mathematics, Fundamentals of Computer Numerical Controlled (CNC) Machine Controls, and Introduction to Computer Aided Manufacturing (CAM). These classes are part of an Associates of Applied Science in Precision Manufacturing.

Aside from coursework, South Texas College hosts events where many manufacturing companies come and speak with students about their chosen field. Other times, students visit said companies. Furthermore, many of these companies give their contact information and offer internships or job opportunities. For example, just two weeks ago, I got a company card from GE Aerospace in McAllen. Why aerospace, you may ask? Well, along my journey, I decided that I wanted to become an Aerospace Engineer, a meaningful and highly rewarding career that would allow me to give back to my parents what they never had. This career would help me be a role model that others in my family will look up to. And I realized that my manufacturing class is helping me achieve just that.

Aerospace engineering requires a fair amount of computer-aided design to create a model of spacecraft or aircraft components. To have the opportunity to contribute to space exploration, no matter what role you play, isn't that amazing? Of course it is! Manufacturing also plays a big role in aerospace since you cannot have the parts for a rocket without manufacturing them first.

South Texas College offered me an opportunity to make an impact—a chance to pursue a meaningful career that would benefit not only me but also my family, and for that I'm forever thankful.