



NEWS

El Camino College | Public Relations & Marketing Department
16007 Crenshaw Blvd., Torrance, CA 90506
Contact: Ann M. Garten, Director, Community Relations
Telephone: (310) 660-3406 | E-Mail: agarten@elcamino.edu

For Immediate Release

June 8, 2009

El Camino College's Outstanding Students Set to Transfer

When **Johnny Torres** talks about his academic history, he quickly admits that he didn't start out as the best student. He is embarrassed, but he continues to tell his story anyway, in the hopes it will inspire others to follow the same path.

Johnny enrolled at El Camino College four years ago, barely able to read and write. After years of hard work, determination, and dozens of math and physics courses, he will graduate on June 12 from El Camino College with the Class of 2009 and will transfer to UCLA to double major in biology and bio physics, with a goal to complete medical school and become a doctor who works with amputees and burn victims. Johnny was also accepted to the University of California at Berkeley and is the first in his family to go to college.

Academics wasn't a priority in his youth – Johnny ran with friends around the San Pedro housing project where he grew up and soon dropped out of high school and got into trouble. After working for a couple of years, he took a year of courses at another community college and did "C" work – pretty decent, he figures, for a guy who was basically illiterate. Encouraged by a professor, Johnny joined the Army and worked his way to the elite U.S. Army Rangers, where he completed several overseas assignments.

He retired from the military in 2004 and decided to give his education another chance – this time at El Camino College.

"After seeing how low I scored on those first tests, I felt humiliated – I could barely spell," Johnny explained. "But I don't ever want to forget it – that embarrassment is what lifted me up, it made me determined to rise above. I don't think many people know what it feels like to absolutely have no knowledge and then be in a college situation."

Johnny quickly caught up with basic reading and writing skills with regular tutoring from the El Camino College Writing Center – and for math, tutors from the college's MESA (Math, Engineering, Science Achievement) program also helped. Now, he is a tutor for others, and he volunteers for various youth groups in his community. He wants to make a difference in the lives of others.

"When I was a Ranger, I pushed myself to a physical standard higher than most Americans, and on the other hand, I could barely write," he said "I decided then that I didn't want to waste my life – I didn't want to limit myself. I wanted to shoot for the stars. I want the kids from the projects to

see me succeed. I tell them – ‘I never gave up, so you have no excuse.’ I think it’s good to put myself in that position because I know where they are coming from.”

For his next challenge, Johnny feels prepared for UCLA – he knows he can do the work and knows what he needs to work on.

“It is so important for me to do well and help others because it honors the work of the people at El Camino College who went out of their way to help me. From the counselors to the professors, they took the extra step. Helping me wasn’t just a job to them.”

Shaminna Mingon Jones is on her way to a nursing career, a path she is proud to pursue.

As the student speaker at the 62nd Annual Commencement ceremony at El Camino College, Shaminna is eager to share her story with classmates and guests. It is a story full of challenges – and ultimately triumph. After graduation from El Camino College, she will transfer to California State University, Los Angeles to major in nursing.

“I want to be a nurse because my deceased mother started in nursing, but was unable to finish,” said Shaminna, who plans on a career as an emergency room nurse. “So, I decided to finish. It took more than two years, but I stuck in there. I bounced back from hardships and continued.”

Born and raised in Los Angeles, Shaminna attended El Camino Real High School in Woodland Hills. When she was 16 Shaminna’s mother passed away. By the time she was 17, she enrolled at El Camino College – her first choice.

“When I first came to El Camino College, the campus reminded me of my high school, because of the diversity of the students. I love that,” she said. “After getting more involved in my studies, I found the courses were great, the teachers and counselors were outstanding, and so many people were ready to help me.”

Shaminna pursued her studies while working full time at Harbor UCLA Medical Center. She got married three years ago and now she and her husband have a 1-year-old baby.

Working full time, a new baby, and a full load of classes – all this makes her life quite busy. But she is happy to do it – she said she is motivated by her husband and family, who are all very proud.

“My mother was my inspiration – I know that this is what she would like me to do if she were still here. I know she would also be proud.”

###