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100 Miles per Week Commute Pays Off; El Camino College Student to Transfer to UC Santa Cruz

John Twedt travels 100 miles each week to attend El Camino College. He began taking a couple of night classes three years ago while working as a carpenter at ExxonMobil in Torrance. With the economic downturn, he was laid off and began taking more classes.

"I liked El Camino College so much I decided to stay," said John, who will graduate from El Camino College on June 8. "At first I was just looking to learn vocational skills, but I found out it was possible to earn an engineering degree. It is worth it to drive so far each week for this college."

John will give up his lengthy commute this fall, as he plans to transfer to the University of California at Santa Cruz.

A recent recipient of the prestigious \$7,000 National Science Foundation Achievement in Science, Engineering and Mathematics Scholarship (NSF ASEMS), John's award will help pay for tuition and books next year. He also secured the \$1,000 Northrop Grumman Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Scholarship, and a \$4,000 NSF ASEMS Scholarship earlier this year.

"These scholarships make all the difference to me," John said. "I would have dropped out by now if I didn't have this help. There is no way I could have done it without these scholarships. It has made all the difference between going to school and not."

John feels prepared for the rigors of the engineering program at UC Santa Cruz. He credits the support from scholarships and the El Camino College Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement (MESA) program as keys to his success.

"When I first started coming to El Camino College I really didn't have any sense of direction, but MESA lined up all of the resources and put them at my fingertips," he said. "I was fortunate to have found MESA early on; it's a great environment, where everyone is serious about school and trying to go for it. I'm a first-generation college student and to have all this ready for me was a huge deal. It helped me find my way."

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