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

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El Camino College Compton Center's First Year Experience Program Provides Students with a Supportive Environment that Facilitates their Continued Success

Like many Californians, Maria Rojas was struggling to find work. Rojas' cousin, who is an El Camino College Compton Center alumna, encouraged her to consider going to college. After some initial trepidation, Rojas attended a registration assistance session where she was introduced to the First Year Experience (FYE) program. Rojas, a mother of four who had always struggled with staying in school, was a perfect candidate for this program and decided to enroll. The FYE program is designed to help students be successful in their first year of college by providing a learning community that includes educational and career services.

"Before the FYE program my approach to life was that whatever is going to happen is going to happen and there's not much you can do about it. Now I know that whatever effort I put forth matters. This next year, my goal is to keep up my GPA and get straight A's," says Rojas.

This new outlook represents a transformation that occurred in Rojas as a result of FYE. In 1993, just a couple months shy of graduating from Narbonne High School, Rojas dropped out. Years later, in 2004, her coworkers at an alcohol and drug recovery treatment center motivated her to go back to school and earn her high school diploma. It took less than a year, but after completing the process she decided to take some time off to raise her four children instead of continuing on to college. Another six years would pass before she enrolled as a student at ECC Compton Center in 2010.

Looking back on the 2010-2011 academic year, Rojas says, "I became really close with all of the FYE students. We were all different ages and came from different backgrounds, but together we made such a great group. At one point, I remember wishing that all of my loved ones could have this same experience."

One of the classes responsible for bringing the 2010-2011 FYE cohort together was Human Development, taught by FYE Program Director Rebecca Mason. In addition to helping the students pinpoint their likes and dislikes in order to choose a major, Mason emphasizes the idea that the students need to become the creators of their own destiny. Another focus of the program is to encourage the students to apply for scholarships. All of the recommendations and hard work paid off for Rojas, who was the recipient of two scholarships: the Behavioral Sciences scholarship and the Robert Spieker scholarship.

Rojas is looking forward to excelling in her classes this coming year and preparing to transfer. She would like to go to California State University, Dominguez Hills or California State University, Long Beach to study history.

"I want to be a history teacher because I am inspired by my father's love of history. He's the type of person who will give you a history lesson anytime you ask him a question."

About El Camino College Compton Center

El Camino College Compton Center is the community's education solution offering a full complement of transfer and degree courses, as well as career and technical education. Students may earn an associate degree or certificate, transfer to a four-year university or train for a career. El Camino College Compton Center is located at 1111 E. Artesia Boulevard, Compton, CA.

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