I am honored to continue the tradition of focusing on students tonight. The passion of our faculty is very evident to me as so many wonderful student stories were shared. It wasn’t easy to select these few student success stories to highlight tonight. Students – as I call your name, please stand while I read your story – and remain standing while I read each student story. I will ask family and friends and teachers to hold your applause until after all student stories have been read so we can honor these students together.

Albina Liikala

- Born in Russia to a mother exposed to radiation from the Chernobyl nuclear meltdown while pregnant. Albina has multiple and ongoing health challenges as a result and has spent much of her life in hospitals.
- Her biological mother was unable to take care of Albina, so she was placed in an orphanage in Russia at a time when Russia was closing orphanages. She was adopted by parents in Santa Cruz in 1993. When she came to the United States, she had her foot amputated due to a birth defect.
- Albina graduated from an alternative high school and came to Cabrillo. She is very appreciative of the learning communities that engaged her as a student here at Cabrillo and helped her become a successful student. She began with what is now the Academy for College Excellence (ACE) and then developed an interest in Math and Science and speaks very highly of her experiences with MESA and the Math Learning Center.
- Ali will transfer to SFSU in Exercise and Movement Science and has been accepted as an intern in the prestigious SF Prosthetics and Orthopedics program. Her long-term goal is to get a Ph.D. in Prosthetics at Dominguez Hills State University in Long Beach and become a prosthetic practitioner.
Darwin Constantino

- Born in the Philippines. His family moved to Canada where he grew up.
- In 2007, his family moved to Santa Cruz. However, he has grown in confidence with his tutoring jobs in physics, chemistry, math and engineering.
- Darwin began serving in the student senate over 2 years ago and was elected to fill the post of treasurer. The Student Senate recently presented him with the “Outstanding Student Leadership Award.”
- Darwin is leaving Cabrillo with confidence and strong leadership skills. He is looking forward to transferring to UC Davis as a Chemical Engineering/Material Science major. His goal is to pursue graduate studies in a related field so he can work in research and development of pharmaceuticals with the goal of advancing medicine and enhancing public health.
- Darwin is an example of what college engagement can mean for student success.

Charlotte Achen

- Charlotte went to Delta high school and completed Cabrillo CG courses while attending high school.
- She went through the Academy for College Excellence working her way through basic skills courses to the Honors Transfer Program.
- Charlotte began serving in AGS four years ago, providing extensive community service and serving as the AGS president for one year.
- Two years ago, she was elected as the Cabrillo College student body president and reelected last year for a second term. Charlotte is the first student in the history of Cabrillo College to serve 2 full consecutive years as student body president.
- Charlotte completed a comprehensive education plan to cover multiple transfer goals; all with a 3.75 GPA. She did all of this with minimal finances.
- She is the recipient of the Karl S. Pister and Baskin Scholarship awards as well as the Student Affairs Outstanding Leadership Award.
- Charlotte is transferring to UCSC.

Ethan Downey

- Began surfing in elementary school and continued through his adult life.
- Ethan took classes in ECE and obtained a teaching position at the Google Children’s Center where he worked for a year until he suffered a major surfing accident.
- Rehabilitation has been a full time job for Ethan. Ethan worked countless hours to recover from his traumatic injuries. His determination to get well and to return to working with children motivated him.
As soon as he was able, Ethan returned to Cabrillo. He is now also able to surf again and gets joy from surfing and working with children. Though in constant pain as a result of his surfing accident, Ethan says that the joy he gets from being with children helps him get through his days.

With persistence and determination he graduates today with two degrees (ECE and Liberal Arts) and four certificates with honors.

June House

High school dropout in 1982, she had two sons and supported them as a single mom. After her younger son graduated from HS, he started classes at Cabrillo and June decided to continue her own education.

With support from the Fast-track to work program, she got an associate degree in medical assisting.

She realized she loved taking classes and continued at Cabrillo. Now she is graduating with a history major and will transfer to UC Berkeley in the fall. She plans to go to grad school and pursue a career in teaching, hoping to teach history to students with special needs.

Chris Kinney

Began in 2009 at Cabrillo. Began in basic skills math and wasn’t sure what he wanted to do.

When he took Physics 10, he said “It was everything I was interested in."

Science is not something Chris ever thought he would be interested in, but he said “I started from the low, low, low. There is no way I could have gotten to where I am without the help and resources from the Math Learning Center, the Physics Learning Center and MESA.”

Chris is graduating with an A.S. in mathematics today and transferring to UCSC in the fall as a Physics major and a recipient of a $25,000 scholarship award to cover his next two years.
Chris Kinney will be earning an A.S. in mathematics today before transferring to UCSC in the Fall as a Physics major and a recipient of a $25,000 scholarship award to cover his next two years. Chris started out in 2009 not knowing what he wanted to do. He began his math coursework with Math 254, Arithmetic, and began trying out some classes and ideas of what to major in, until he found himself in a Physics 10 class as a general education requirement. He recounts, "It was everything I was interested in, I just didn't realize that what I was interested in was Physics!"

He overcame his nervousness and went to his instructor to introduce himself and to discuss possibly changing his major to physics. He asked to sit in on some lectures from one of the calculus-based physics class. At the time, he didn't understand anything that was being talked about, but thought it seemed really cool. He made steady progress through his math, which he really likes, but finds difficult and started to make friends with others who were also studying physics and engineering. According to Chris, one really can't major in science and mathematics without studying all the time and sometimes pulling your hair out, so it is vital to have friends in those majors.

Chris attended a local high school, but dropped out as a freshman and later finished at Continuation High School. Nobody in his family has any background in science, but he somehow found his passion in it. He says, "I started from the low, low, low. There is no way I could have gotten to where I am without the help and resources from the Math Learning Center, the Physics Learning Center and MESA. And I always wanted to give back to these places where I got so much help. Now I have worked as a tutor in all three places."

According to Chris, math and science really changed the way he looks at everything. He really thinks more people need to do it. He says, "What I would say to students like me that are just starting out is Instead of giving up, get a cup of coffee and push on."

Lauren McEvoy is getting her A.A. in Liberal Arts and Sciences this semester. She has loved science ever since she was a junior at San Lorenzo Valley High, when she took an aquaculture class and found a mentor in that teacher. But it was hard to know exactly what she wanted to do, because there were so many choices.

As she went through Cabrillo for the past 4 years, she realized that her passion was in environmental studies. She stays involved in a lot of volunteer activities and student clubs. She's been part of the Honors Program, anthropology's Diggit Club, the Outdoor Club, and the honor society, AGS. She volunteers for Valley Churches, for beach cleanup, and the Homeless Garden Project for any kind of volunteer opportunity, she really will be there.

By researching local agencies involved in water quality issues, she was able to create for herself an unpaid internship for the Coastal Watershed Council doing extensive water testing. Her passion involves helping to preserve our environment with conservation efforts not just for the human population, but for all organisms; animals, plants, etc. According to Lauren, she has
gotten everything from Cabrillo. Sometimes she thinks she has been here too long, but it has made her learn a lot about what she wants to do and what she does not want to do, and that has been invaluable. She is glad that she didn't go directly to a university and then change majors several times. She says she would not have been able to afford it, and would have been in so much debt right now.

She gives a lot of credit for her success to support programs such as the Math Learning Center, MESA, and to the dedicated students and staff there. She has been saving since she was 15 years old to go to university. This was her dream since she was a young girl, and now it is coming true, as she transfers in the fall to UCSC to study Environmental Science. She says, "My parents and siblings have been a huge part of my success. They have been so supportive with their pride and love, even though they can't always advise me about my college issues. They are my heroes. My mom says I amaze her.

My schedule always was go to school, go to work and then go home to care for my dad, who battled cancer for 2 years and just recently passed away. One of her instructors has this to say about Lauren, "Since the first day, Lauren has brought an inquisitive enthusiasm to our class whether it is during the ecology class fieldwork -counting parasites, pulling invasive weeds, and measuring sand crabs, or developing her own ideas for a research project, and while in lecture she is always asking questions, and participating in discussions."

Lauren has faced a significant life challenge in the past few weeks -losing her father very suddenly, and she appears to be taking it with a lot of humility, grace and acceptance. She strives to do good work and make the most of her coursework and I think she will be amazing at whichever career path she chooses. Lauren's advice to other students would be, "Don't do what everybody else is doing, do what YOU love to do. Find what you really love to do and go for it, because then, the sky is the limit. If you want to do something, you have to do it; nobody else will do it for you." Her favorite quote is from Gandhi, "You must be the change you wish to see in the world."

Bethany Schultz will be getting an AS in Biology and an AA in Liberal Arts today and in the fall transferring to CSU, Monterey Bay, to major in Applied Ecology Environmental Science. It has been a long journey for her at Cabrillo, from the time she began taking classes here as a high school student. She began taking classes in order to major in scientific illustration. And then, as a general education requirement, she took the Global society and Culture class because it was a GE requirement, but in that class she discovered that her passion was a career that involved dealing with our many environmental issues. Bethany says that it turned out that class changed her life. She has been studying to understand the hard core science as well as the social and cultural issues that are also tied into the important environmental issues of our day.

She has proceeded slowly, since she has been on her own financially since high school. She has had a long road of financial struggle, since she has not qualified for financial aid for most of her time at Cabrillo. Just paying for food and lodging has taken a lot of her focus in the past years. One of the biggest things Bethany has had to learn is to balance work and study. She was working for an interior landscaping business when the opportunity came to buy the business.
She realized that if she wanted to work for an NGO someday, it would be useful to have her own side business to continue to support herself. So she did an apprenticeship, took out a loan and bought the business. As an entrepreneur, she has learned many lessons about the business world and even more importantly, in finding the balance between work and study, since she has been taking math and science coursework. She worked with her counselor to find the right transfer university, and the hands-on approach in the Applied Ecology major offered at CSU, Monterey Bay will be exactly what she needs. She is currently cross-enrolling there in an environmental case study class. Her project concerns how we in California recycle plastics that are mostly then shipped to China. She is learning about what happens to those materials there.

Bethany has been an active participant in the Cabrillo Sustainability Council, which has given her insights about how even an institution that has commitments to move toward a greener future has to proceed slowly and involve every constituent while trying to make changes. She is learning how hard it is to get things done, and how to move through the system. Bethany has also taught martial arts the whole time she has been at Cabrillo to act as a source of health benefits as well as an income stream. "It helped me when I was a rebellious teenager, so I didn't want to leave that behind. It just makes the juggling process a little more complicated."

Albina (Ali) Liikala is receiving an AA in Communications today, even though her major is in the realm of science and math. In the fall she will be transferring to San Francisco State University to major in health science and prosthetics. Since communication is such a prized quality to have in the field she is entering, she thought it was important to get her first degree in this area.

Albina has been attending Cabrillo for 4 years, as it took her time to decide what the right career direction for her was. She has explored majors from Horticulture to Mathematics during that time. But she now has a long-term goal to earn a doctorate in prosthetics and orthopedics. This is especially relevant to Albina, as she survived the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl. At the time, her mother was pregnant with Ali, and she was born with a lot of birth defects, including a missing left foot. She was evacuated with her family and has been in the US for over ten years now.

She attended Santa Cruz High School, and describes herself as NOT the best student in high school. She describes the severe body image problems and self-destructive impulses that once plagued her. She was able to leave all of that behind, in coming to Cabrillo and making her way here, where she is now earning straight A's.

In addition to transferring to San Francisco State this fall, she has also been accepted into a long term internship position at a prestigious prosthetic devices company. Albina now has a silicon foot-which works great, she says, and can be put right into the washing machine. All her classes and volunteer experiences at Cabrillo helped her shape the right future for herself. From volunteering at the Art Department Tool Room to helping beginning computer science students, she is always willing to help students. That is what helps me, she says. My father made me a business card since I spend so much time helping others. It says "Can-Do Ali at Cabrillo College."

So many faculty from the Mathematics, Communications, Horticulture, Biology, Art and Physics Departments have been her mentors and inspiration. All of those experiences went together to...
"build me," she recounts. "I owe so much to the faculty and also the tutors in all of those subjects." To students who are just starting out she would say, "Just show up! You can do it! Call me!"

Darwin Constantino is getting an AA in Liberal Arts, an AS in Chemistry, an AS in Engineering and an AA in Mathematics and is also transferring as a Chemical Engineering major to UC Davis this fall. He has been at Cabrillo for four years and he describes it as a long and winding journey.

Darwin graduated from Soquel High, then came to Cabrillo with the intention of a major in chemical engineering, because that just seemed to match his interests. What he did not have was any strong motivation or passion for the subject. It was meeting really great teachers at Cabrillo that he says motivated him and also opened a lot of doors to opportunities on campus. Darwin worked in the Physics Learning Center, in the Summer Energy Academy and as a math leader for the STARS learning community students. These experiences affected him strongly. They were not only a lot of fun, but they taught him more about the subject matter and about the rewards of helping motivate students in their learning.

Then another student made him aware of the work of the Student Senate and he decided to become involved in that, and has done so for the past two + years - he is currently the Treasurer! Darwin talks about what an honor it has been representing the sciences in the Student Senate. It is so hard to juggle the demands of coursework with the time needed to be involved in student government that he says there is usually little representation from this area. He is very proud of having the privilege of being in a student leadership role. "Putting yourself in a leadership position eventually makes you a better person," Darwin says. "It gives you skills to learn to manage your time, to voice your opinions and to voice other people's opinions. It has allowed me to meet many, many faculty and staff and has made me so grateful for this whole college." His student leadership role led him to be involved in many clubs on campus which are involved in academics and community service. For instance, he led the AGS Volunteer Tutoring efforts. He started the STARS Club to help keep students motivated and involved in their studies and in extra-curricular activities. He is very proud to have won the Presidential Award for over 100 hours of community service last year. Now being a leader and a tutor are central parts of his identity. He says, "I got to affect a lot of people. People look up to me. I find myself giving a lot of advice to other students. I have such a respect for the role of tutor and leader now."

Moving on from Cabrillo is a bittersweet experience for Darwin, as he is both sad to be leaving but happy to be taking the next step toward his goal of being a chemical engineer. What advice would Darwin offer to students just starting at Cabrillo? "Put yourself out there. You never know what you are going to be interested in. I was not interested in student government or politics at all, but it led to many valuable opportunities."

Kevin Browning will be getting an AA today in general education, but will be continuing to work on his math and science coursework to transfer in marine science after a year. Kevin, who is now 45, describes that this is a very important milestone for him. It symbolizes his success in remaking his life and in taking control of the direction he is headed. Kevin says, "I
would have liked to have gotten an education, if I had the right encouragement when I was growing up, either from my family or outside influences, but that was not to be; so I have been involved in re-parenting myself and setting myself on a path that is worthy toward work that I care about."

When Kevin was growing up it was dangerous to go to school, and it was dangerous to come home. It was dangerous, period. The high school in his neighborhood was shut down due to race riots. He got into the habit of getting into fights a lot, trying to avoid getting victimized himself. He describes how his family did not want him to get an education, and even took steps to prevent him from doing so. Their lives were wrapped up in destructive and even illegal activities. Despite the pressures of conforming to his family’s ways, Kevin developed a strong interest in doing something positive with his life.

He started spending time at the library, and found some good mentors who introduced him to ecology and environmental values and he realized that this was what he wanted to do. He saved up for a long time and for $75 bought -the McGraw Hill Encyclopedia of Energy. He thought this would teach him everything he needed to know. But, having no educational background, he recalls that everything in that book was over his head. But he was still determined to find a way to educate himself.

He started attending a community college and got his GED, but even doing homework at home was considered an aggressive act to his family. So he left home and came to Santa Cruz because it had impressed him once before when he was passing through as a place where environmental issues were valued. He started without knowing anybody at all. Now he tries to meet people who are trying to do positive things. He surrounds himself with educated, caring people. Kevin describes this as his chance to recreate his life as purely and perfectly as possible, and make all the right choices. He has done a lot of environmental work since that time. His commitment to the long process of getting an education is all that he cares about now, it is all he does.

Next semester he will be a TA in his Marine Biology class. When he started taking classes, Kevin recalls that he would only accept getting an A. He was getting a B in one of his math classes and went to tell the instructor that he was going to drop. The instructor said-don't do that, you are doing well. Kevin says he is getting over that kind of thing now. There may be few students here today with the feeling of accomplishment and pride that he has in his progress.

Maria Rodriguez (autobiography)

My name is Maria Rodriguez; I was born in Jalisco, Mexico in August 19, 1992. I lived in a little town called San Pedro Tesistan close to Guadalajara, Jalisco until I was 11 years old. As a child I was a very happy girl. I lived with my two parents, Lorena Gutierrez (mother) and Andres Rodriguez (father.) I also had a little sister who was three years younger than me her name is Marycarmen Rodriguez.

We lived very modest back in Mexico, my dad was a fisherman and my mom didn't work, she just took care of us and was in charge of the household. Most of my family lived in
the same town as us: my grandparents, my uncles and aunts, cousins, etc. I went to an elementary school called Juan Escutia. There I was one of the best students from the whole school. I really enjoyed learning new things every day and I tried to be the best at everything I could.

Even though my family was not rich we had what was necessary to live a decent life. My sister and I were very happy kids; we went to school and then played with our friends just as normal kids do. I was going to start 6th grade when a tragedy happened. My dad died in a fishing accident and my life gave a twist of 180 degrees. My mom didn’t have a job and we didn’t own a house either. She was in a huge debt after my father’s death because she had to pay a lot for the funeral. All of our family was devastated and we didn’t know what to do. My mother was pregnant at the time; she had three months of pregnancy. Then a month after we buried my dad one of my aunts who lived in Bakersfield, California offered my mom the opportunity to immigrate to the United States to try to start a new life with us.

My mom knew that it was very risky to travel the long odyssey from Mexico to California. My aunt offered to all of our papers for us. She said all we had to worry about was to get in a bus from Guadalajara to Sonora and there people would be waiting for us. It was a long shot but my mom decided to take the chance to offer us a better future in the United States. We arrived to Bakersfield, California in June.

For the rest of the summer we stayed in my aunt's home. My mom was now about 7 months pregnant. My aunt said we could stay in her house until my little brother was born and then my mom could find a job. Meanwhile, I was going to start going to school. The first day of school I realized that all classes were going to be in complete English and I didn't know a single word so I was going to have to start from the beginning. At first I felt very frustrated; I would sit in class and not understand a single word the teacher said. When I got home I would ask my cousin to help me with my homework and she would just laugh at me. It was all that frustration and anger that motivated me to try my hardest to learn fast and prove to those who didn't believe in me that something could be done if you put your mind to it.

When my little brother was born, my mother named him Andres after my dad's name. When he was two months old we moved to Watsonville, California where the rest of my family was living: my grandparents who had immigrated two years before us, and I had two uncles and aunts who had lived here for a couple of years. We moved here in December so there was no work for my mom yet. We stayed with one of our uncles who lived in the outsides of town.

When school started I began in the 5th grade again because the principal said that since I didn't know much English I wouldn't be able to handle middle school well. I did really well in the 5th grade and then the next year I started to go to Lakeview Middle School. This was probably the hardest years of my life because I used to be teased and bullied by my classmates there because according to them I looked "too Mexican" and I had a really bad accent when speaking English. I have to admit that their comments made me feel very sad and depressed at times but deep down inside me there was a voice that would tell me to not listen to them and to keep on being myself. I used to get teased for being a "schoolgirl", "geek" and especially "nerd" because
I was too "obsessed" with being perfect with my schoolwork. Nevertheless I still kept on doing my best so that I could learn the language perfectly and succeed in this country.

Meanwhile, my mom started to work in the fields picking strawberries because that was the job that my uncles had. They taught her how to do it well but she realized that it was very tough work. She once told me one day after she got from work very tired "Mija, study hard so that you don't have to spend the rest of your life picking strawberries like me." I always recall those words every time I feel like studying is not really worth it. My mom would work really hard to give my two little brothers and me the basic stuff we needed to survive. I really appreciated everything she was doing for us and I wanted to make her feel proud. I dreamed of one day dedicating my high school diploma to her in front of a crowd in graduation day.

After I finished middle school I began high school at Pajaro Valley high School. I liked the school in some ways but I also disliked it a lot. I didn't like the fact that there were a lot of distractions that didn't allow students to concentrate properly in class. There were the friends who would convince you to ditch class, those friends who would spread rumors about you and start drama, and the boys who would ask you to be their girlfriend and then add some more drama to your life or the little cliques that would form to criticize and intimidate others. I realized that the teachers there were amazing but all those distractions might not help me concentrate well in school. However when I was there I always tried my best in every class and I always earned an A or A+ in every class. My main goal was that at the end of the quarter I could earn all A's to go home and show my mother my 4.0 report card and see that smile of pride in her face. That was the best prize I could get.

When I was a sophomore my mom told me one day that she needed me to help her. I said, "Yes mom what can I do?" She then told me "I need you to work too because the money I earn is not enough to sustain you and your brothers, "me estoy haciendo vieja," and I need your help." I told my mom that I would help her but that I wasn't going to drop out of high school. She told me that together we would find a way for me to stay in school and work at the same time. So we talked to the counselors and they talked to us about Pacific Coast Charter School, which is an independent studies school where students work at their own pace through the textbooks and then complete a final project at the end of the semester and get the same worth of credits as a normal high school. The high school diploma is worth the same but the student does not have to be fulltime in class. This was the best option for me and so I set my mind to think that I would try my best to finish high school as soon as possible so that I could completely concentrate on working side to side with my mother to provide for my family.

I asked my counselor if I could graduate one year earlier. She said it was possible but that I would have an extra load of work (twice as my classmates.) I said it was okay that I could handle it. So I technically did my "junior" year in the fall of 2009 and then my "senior" year in the spring of 2010. My counselor was very proud to tell me that I would graduate that same year with the rest of the seniors. I had some doubts that I would achieve my goal because at times it was very difficult for me to stay on top of my schoolwork while working at the strawberry fields right next to my mother. However, I also felt very happy to tell my mom that I was almost done. Then my counselor told me that this was just the beginning. She said that I
had to apply for college. I told her that I didn't have the resources and she offered to help me apply for scholarships that I could get since I couldn't apply for FAFSA or any other federal grant. Luckily I was accepted at Cabrillo College as an (AB540) student and I was even granted a $1000 scholarship.

To my surprise I was also accepted to other several scholarships to which I applied because I just wanted to have several options in case I didn't get the scholarship. At the end I ended up with $5,000 in scholarship money. I was very happy that I would be able to go to college and that money would not be a problem for me. In my high school graduation I had the opportunity to give the speech as Valedictorian of my group and I finally made my dream come true. I dedicated my diploma and all my achievements to my mother and thanked her for her support. In an interview from the Santa Cruz Sentinel I mentioned to the interviewers that I knew of somebody who would be very proud clapping for me from up above; my daddy. I promised my mom that I would try my best to complete a college career and make good use of the scholarship money I received.

In the fall of 2010 I started Cabrillo as a fulltime student. It was hard at first because my fieldwork was not over yet so I had to alternate my work and my studies to make it work out for me just like when I was in high school. After a while I got used to it and then I could do both and still have some free time for me to go out with my friends, surf through the Internet, work out in the gym, etc. I am currently enrolled in what should be my last semester in Cabrillo. I will soon be completing my AS in Computer Applications Business Technology (CABT). Along the way I have obtained several certificates in Administrative Support, Computer Skills for the Office, Professional Computer Applications, etc. Every day I feel closer to my goal. I am very excited to attend Cabrillo College's commencement this spring. I know my mother and all my family feels very proud to see me finally graduate. I would really like to transfer to a 4-year university to complete a BA in Business or a human resources related field. However, my short-term goal is to find a job that relates to my current career and then I can keep on helping my family while still save up for university later on. At some point I thought that even with my schooling I wasn't going to get accepted at any other job than the fields because of my immigration situation. Now recently, last year I was able to apply to the DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals.) Two months after I filed my application I got accepted and as soon as I received my work permit I applied for my SSN to be able to start looking for a job. Fieldwork is a very decent job but it is very backbreaking and only seasonal. We live in a very small home and must pay monthly rent and seasonal fieldwork is just not enough. I have been looking for various opportunities so that I can prove what I am capable of with my computer and people skills but the job market is very hard. My dream has always been to stay in the strawberry market but working from the office. Working for Driscoll's has been my goal since I can remember because my mom has worked for them in the past in the strawberry fields and she recalls them as being very nice to their employees.

Last year I wanted to apply for an internship with Driscoll's hoping to learn many more things about the company and hopefully seeking a permanent job there but I didn't have my Driver's License in order to apply. This year I have been working very hard at it and I have just obtained my Driver's License two weeks ago. Now my next goal is to get into the Internship
program at Driscoll's and be of help there while getting hands on experience that can lead to a permanent job. I know like every other goal I have reached, it may take a while and various attempts but I am not about to give up. I know that hard work always pays off and whether it is today, tomorrow, in a month or in year, I will reach my goal because there is not limits when you really want to achieve something and I always remember an old saying that helps to inspire me to keep on going, "Don't tell me sky is the limit when there is footprints on the moon." - Paul Brandt

Check out this link of the Santa Cruz Sentinel to read the article about me published in 2010. http://www.santacruzsentinel.com/ci 15196926

Jamil Johnson (autobiography)

My name is Jamil Johnson. I was born in Santa Cruz, California on September 8, 1982. By some auspicious hand of fate, my mother and I share the same birthday. She must have been blissful to have a son as a present. Interestingly, I was born at home in the same house I have lived in for thirty years. I am fortunate to live in a spiritual environment with my mother and father. It is a blessing to have spirituality as an essential part of my life.

I began my education as a little boy at Mount Madonna for pre-school and kindergarten. All the schools that I have attended from elementary school to the present day have been in the Santa Cruz area. I went to Natural Bridges Elementary School from first to sixth grade. I then moved on to a whole new world at Mission Hill Junior High for seventh and eighth grade. After what seemed like four long years of blood, sweat, and tears, I graduated from Santa Cruz High School in June of 2001. I received a George Ow Scholarship to help me attend Cabrillo College. It was later that year that I began my journey at Cabrillo.

I attended Cabrillo from 2001 up until 2004. After about three years, I was feeling the effects of burnout very intensely. I had lost my purpose and direction. I knew in my bones that it was time to leave school and do something else, whatever that path may be. In fact, from the way I felt at that time, I was convinced that I would not come back.

During my time away from school, I had many interesting experiences. I got a job working at a movie theater, which I held for a little over a year. I also had the opportunity to take a series of classes in Buddhism at Land of Medicine Buddha. I needed to learn more about the inner world, which our education system usually does not explore. With some persuading by my mother, I reluctantly enrolled in a Certified Nursing Assistant class through the Santa Cruz Adult School. I decided not to take the exam to become certified, since I really was not interested in that kind of work. However, I'm grateful for all the things I learned.

In 2007, by some miracle, I got the motivation to return to Cabrillo, despite my constant insistence that I would never go back to school. I began by taking two keyboarding classes.
After talking to a counselor named Arturo Cantu, I saw how close I was to getting a degree. In June of 2007, I graduated with an AS in Liberal Arts and Sciences and also a Computer Skills Certificate.

Since I had already taken a couple keyboarding classes and Computer Proficiency, I thought I might want to take the plunge and get a degree in Computer Applications/Business Technology. After about two years into this, I decided it would be good to put this plan on hold and take the classes I needed to transfer to a university. In June of 2010, after completing these classes at Cabrillo, I graduated with an AA in Liberal Arts and Sciences. When I found out that not only had I been accepted into the University of California, Santa Cruz but I had also received a Regents Scholarship, I was ecstatic. I knew for sure that fortune was smiling upon me.

After attending UC Santa Cruz for three quarters, I came to the realization that with the fast pace and the amount of work, it was not for me. I was incredibly stressed out. I withdrew from the university in 2011, but I got permission from the teachers to keep attending the classes. It was wonderful to learn without having stress as one of the main factors. I'm grateful that I was able to have the experience of going to the university. There were some good teachers and I got a chance to take some interesting classes, such as West Javanese Gamelan, a music class.

I had to take a much needed break from school again. During the next two years, I was getting out of the house more and connecting with people through different activities that interested me, such as: Capoeira, yoga, dance, and other social events. At a certain point, I began thinking about what I wanted to do in terms of a career. Working in some aspect of the medical field kept floating around in my mind. I have also been longing to find someone special to share my life with for quite a while. I realized that it would be necessary to be financially stable. It seemed like it might be a good idea to go back to school.

I decided to return to Cabrillo in 2013. I have always wanted to finish up my AS degree in Computer Applications/Business Technology. It was the right time to complete this. I'm looking forward to graduating again in June and receiving my much anticipated degree. This will be my third degree at Cabrillo College.

Cabrillo opened many doors for me in my educational career. I truly feel that all the classes I have taken at the community college have expanded my knowledge of so many different subjects. With the help and support of all the wonderful teachers I have had, my learning has soared to new heights. I know that I have become a better person.

Now my goal is to earn an AS degree in Nursing or Radiologic Technology from Cabrillo College and be able to make a living while serving others. I hope to find someone special who I can love with all my heart and soul. I know for sure these things will happen with God's grace.