

RECIPIENT profile

In her pursuit of college, Jessie Torres sets examples for others.



Next fall, Jessie Torres plans to graduate from the University of Nebraska at Kearney (UNK) with a degree in Criminal Justice. With that accomplished, she will set the following examples for students who may not think college is possible:

- If you have support from your family, you can achieve most anything.
- It's possible to go to college even when dealing with a serious illness.
- Help is available to help you achieve college, but you have to ask.
- College is more affordable when you start at a community college.

Jessie's story of perseverance begins in Scottsbluff where she was born and raised. She received an associate degree from Western Nebraska Community College (WNCC) in 2009 and then transferred to UNK to continue her education. As she sets her sights on graduation, she tells the story of how she got this far despite many obstacles.

Tell us about your family

My parents are Irene and Jose Torres and I have three sisters, Esperanza, Rebecca and Maria. Esperanza attends college for accounting, Rebecca attends college for nursing, and Maria is a high school senior who has enlisted in the Marines. My family is very close!

How important was your parents' encouragement in your pursuit of college?

My parents have always pushed me and my sisters to attend school and further our education. Ever since grade school, my parents told us education is very important. I have the support of my parents in anything I do.

What advice do you have for students who want to go to college, but don't have family support?

There is a lot of help out there for students to attend college, but they have to ask. One helpful program is Upward Bound. By being involved



*Above: Jessie (second from left) with her family.
Left: Jessie studying at the UNK library.*

in Upward Bound, I received information about college and how to apply.

Despite dealing with lupus, a serious illness, you have succeeded in college. How have you done it?

There were many times when I did get behind in my classes, but I did my best to catch up and finish strong. I had help from teachers and support from my family and the community. Although I faced many struggles, I kept the motivation and determination to continue my education. I won't let lupus stop me from finishing college.

You started at a community college and then transferred to a four-year college. How did that process benefit you?

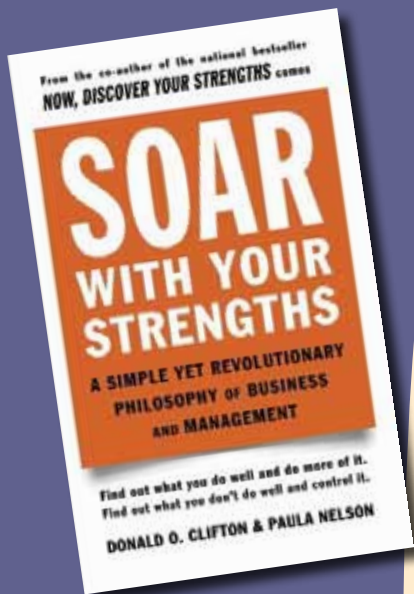
I attended WNCC first because it was close to home and was easier financially. I also wanted to see how college was. This made it easier for me to transfer to a four-year university. There are times when I still need assistance and I contact WNCC for help.

What are your plans after you graduate next fall?

I currently am undecided on a particular career choice, but I am interested in the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Forensics and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

In this issue...

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Learn that, with expectations in tune with your strengths, you can achieve excellence.

"SOAR WITH YOUR STRENGTHS"

How to identify strengths and manage weaknesses

EducationQuest recently sent *Reaching Your Potential* recipients a copy of "Soar with Your Strengths" - an easy-to-read book that will help the students focus on their strengths while managing their weaknesses. It challenges the old adage that "practice makes perfect" and replaces it with "practicing a strength makes perfect."

Here is what can be learned from reading the book:

How to identify your strengths. According to the authors, strengths are characterized by initial rapid learning -- and learning that continues throughout your lifetime. We all have skills that come easy to us. By developing those areas you'll build on your strengths.

How to manage your weaknesses using strategies such as subcontracting, support systems and sloughing. Yes, sloughing. Identify what you don't do well and stop doing it. Stop putting yourself in situations where you consistently fail.

How expectations influence us. We are constantly influenced by what others expect of us and what we expect of ourselves. Read how, with expectations in tune with your strengths, you can achieve excellence!

Submit your nomination for Campus Mentor of the Year!

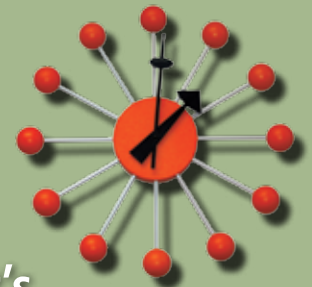
To honor the many campus mentors involved in the *Reaching Your Potential* program, EducationQuest has created the **Campus Mentor of the Year Award!**

EducationQuest encourages you to nominate your *Reaching Your Potential* campus mentor for this award if that person has positively impacted your college experience. If your nominee is selected, he or she will receive a \$100 gift card – and you will receive a \$50 gift card!

Here are the details:

- **Email your nomination to lisam@educationquest.org by March 21.** Include a paragraph explaining why your *Reaching Your Potential* mentor should be selected as *Campus Mentor of the Year*.
- EducationQuest will select the *Campus Mentor of the Year* in April.
- EducationQuest scholarship staff will travel to the winner's campus this spring to present the *Campus Mentor of the Year* with a \$100 gift card and a plaque. The nominating student will receive a \$50 gift card.
- The 2011 *Mentor of the Year* and nominating students will be highlighted in the Summer 2011 issue of *Reaching Out*.

Don't miss this opportunity to thank your *Reaching Your Potential* campus mentor for helping you succeed in college!



It's

FAFSA TIME!

EducationQuest has free online tools to help you complete the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). Visit EducationQuest.org and select "Completing the FAFSA" to view our *FAFSA Checklist*, *FAFSA Tutorial*, and FAFSA videos and podcasts.

If you need additional help filing the FAFSA, contact the EducationQuest location nearest you.

Kearney 800-666-3721

Lincoln 800-303-3745

Omaha 888-357-6300

When you call our offices for an appointment, please identify yourself as a *Reaching Your Potential* recipient.

Tips for referring students to *Reaching Your Potential*



If you're a community agency or college financial aid representative, we encourage you to refer students to *Reaching Your Potential* who face obstacles to higher education yet show the potential to succeed.

Make sure students meet these qualifications:

- Nebraska resident
- U.S. citizen or permanent resident
- Referred by a Nebraska community agency or by a public or private nonprofit college or university
- Seeking an undergraduate degree
- Pursuing a Title IV eligible course of study at a public or private nonprofit college or university in Nebraska within six months of receiving the award
- Completed the 2011-2012 FAFSA and are eligible for a Pell Grant
- Not in default on a student loan or owe repayment on a student grant
- **Current college students** must have at least two semesters/quarters remaining in college* or, if enrolled at a two-year college, intend to transfer to a four-year public or private nonprofit college in Nebraska.
- **High school students** must be in the final semester of their **senior year**.

Follow up with the students you referred

- Encourage them to complete the application.
- Offer to review their application and essays.
- Make sure their application packet is complete.

* - Community college graduation date must be after November 30, 2011.

- Four-year-college graduation date must be after June 30, 2012.

- If the college doesn't have semesters or quarters, must have 25% of program left after June 1, 2011.

Congratulations to our recent graduates!



Nicole Brewer graduated from Metropolitan Community College with an associate degree in early childhood education. She plans to transfer to the University of Nebraska at Kearney for a bachelor's degree.

Tammy Cox graduated from the University of Nebraska Medical Center with a bachelor's degree in nursing.

Michelle Cramer graduated from the University of Nebraska Medical Center with a bachelor's degree in nursing.

Mawut El-Awel graduated from the University of Nebraska at Omaha with a bachelor's degree in business administration

Heidi Grabenschroer graduated from Bellevue University with a bachelor's degree in behavioral science.

Susan Johnson graduated from Western Nebraska Community College with an associate degree in business administration. She transferred to Chadron State College to pursue a bachelor's degree.

Wei Liu graduated from the University of Nebraska at Omaha with a bachelor's degree in accounting.

Wal Majok graduated from Southeast Community College – Lincoln with an associate degree in business administration. He transferred to Peru State College to pursue a bachelor's degree.

Carmon Petters graduated from Wayne State College with a bachelor's degree in criminal justice.

Danielle Woods graduated from the University of Nebraska at Omaha with a bachelor's degree in biology.

Reaching Your Potential Scholarship Recipients

Fall 2010



Ehite Allison, Omaha

Attending University of Nebraska at Omaha
Referred by Student Support Services, Metropolitan Community College, Omaha

As a single mother to five children, Ehite decided to “take charge” and create a better life for her family. She graduated from Metropolitan Community College and is now pursuing a degree in speech communications at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Once she graduates, she hopes to educate minority communities about the importance of a quality education.

Najma Bashir, Omaha

Attending Metropolitan Community College
Referred by Lutheran Refugee Services, Omaha



Najma grew up in a refugee camp in northern Kenya where she excelled in school despite adverse conditions. She received a scholarship to attend high school in another town and then found the courage to come to the United States to attend college. She is pursuing a nursing degree at Metropolitan Community College.



Sara Campagna, Omaha

Attending Metropolitan Community College
Referred by Student Support Services, Metropolitan Community College, Omaha

Despite dealing with medical disorders throughout high school and doctors who felt she was a “lost cause,” Sara found the drive to prove her doctors wrong. She has since maintained a 4.0 grade point average at Metropolitan Community College. After graduating, Sara plans to transfer to the University of Nebraska at Omaha to pursue a journalism degree.

Jacqueline Johnson, Omaha

Attending University of Nebraska at Omaha
Referred by Project Achieve, University of Nebraska at Omaha



Feeling hopeless after the loss of her son and her job, Jacqueline decided to turn her hopelessness into action and continue her education. She is working on a degree in social work from the University of Nebraska at Omaha with aspirations to eventually earn a master’s degree. She wants to be a social worker for an organization that coordinates community resources for underserved families.



Silvester Juanes, Omaha

Attending University of Nebraska at Omaha
Referred by Project Achieve, University of Nebraska at Omaha

Growing up as a migrant worker, Silvester knew he wanted a better life. He overcame extreme obstacles to earn a GED and became licensed as an Emergency Medical Technician. He is now studying pre-med at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. This married father of three is determined to become a doctor and help people who lack basic health care.

Phillip Mays, Beatrice

Attending Southeast Community College, Beatrice
Referred by Student Support Services, Southeast Community College, Beatrice



Overcoming a “vicious cycle of mistakes,” Phillip gained control of his life, earned his GED and worked hard to support his daughter. Realizing he needed a college degree to make a good living, he entered Southeast Community College with aspirations to work in the criminal justice field. He is now looking forward to transferring to Peru State College to continue his education.



Ashley Nabity, Loup City

Attending University of Nebraska at Kearney
Referred by Omaha Home for Boys, Omaha

Ashley experienced a traumatic childhood, which led to behavioral problems in high school. She eventually entered an independent living program where she completed her GED. Determined to achieve a college degree, she is now attending the University of Nebraska at Kearney working toward a degree in criminal justice. Her goal is to work with adolescent youth.

Jamia Perry, Bellevue

Attending University of Nebraska at Omaha
Referred by Project Achieve, University of Nebraska at Omaha

Growing up in a negative and, at times, abusive environment, Jamia found herself living on her own by age 16. Choosing to look past her hardships and find ways to improve her life, Jamia is pursuing a degree at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. She is undecided on her major but is determined to become an educated and successful woman.



Nicole Schnittger, Scottsbluff

Attending Western Nebraska Community College
Referred by Student Support Services, Western Nebraska Community College, Scottsbluff

Growing up in a dysfunctional home, Nicole, as a single mother, found herself in a similar situation. Determined to build a better life, she and her son moved to Nebraska to start a new life. She now attends Western Nebraska Community College with plans to transfer to the University of Nebraska at Omaha to study pre-med.

Brooke Sullivan, Lincoln

Attending Southeast Community College, Lincoln
Referred by Southeast Community College, Lincoln

Brooke grew up as the daughter of a single mother who suffered from cognitive and emotional issues due to a stroke. This led to issues that Brooke experienced throughout school. She sought help and learned techniques to help her succeed in college. She now attends Southeast Community College in Lincoln with plans to transfer to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Her goal is to earn a degree in business administration.



Pedro Vasquez, Grand Island

Attending University of Nebraska at Kearney
Referred by Student Support Services, University of Nebraska at Kearney

Growing up in Guatemala, Pedro lived in poverty and political uncertainty. In 1991, he came to the United States to find a better life. In addition to working long hours, he learned English and has gained citizenship. This husband and father of two is now pursuing his ultimate goal – a degree in social work from the University of Nebraska at Kearney.

Cynthia Wurdeman, Scottsbluff

Attending Western Nebraska Community College
Referred by Nebraska Workforce Development, Alliance

Cynthia experienced many obstacles throughout her life including the loss of her mother when she was 12 years old and her sons' serious medical issues. She says these experiences "shaped her dreams and goals for herself and her family." She now attends Western Nebraska Community College with plans to transfer to the University of Nebraska Medical Center. Her goal is to become a nurse practitioner.



Not pictured... **Deanna Wilson, Gering**

Attending Western Nebraska Community College
Referred by Student Support Services, Western Nebraska Community College, Scottsbluff

A single mother to two children, Deanne survived serious heart problems and breast cancer. She is now ready to embrace life and embark on a new career path in the field of health information technology. Deanna is pursuing that goal at Western Nebraska Community College. Her dream job is to become a writer for a professional healthcare publication.

PROGRAM Reminders

Reaching Your Potential referrals due March 18

If you know of a client or student who may qualify for the *Reaching Your Potential* scholarship program, refer them by **March 18** at **EducationQuest.org/ryp.asp**.

See page 3 for referral tips.



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Introducing... Maggie Nelson!

Maggie has joined our *Reaching Your Potential* team as a mentor. She and Lisa Mueller are available to answer your questions.



Contact Maggie at
800.303.3745, ext. 6619
or maggienn@educationquest.org.

Please share...

your academic or personal
accomplishments with us!

Contact
Lisa Mueller
800.303.3745,
ext. 6606
or email
lisam@educationquest.org



Or... find Lisa on Facebook!
(She's in the Lincoln, NE network)

Follow us on Facebook.

Reaching for the stars

Brandon Thornburg and wife Samantha welcomed a daughter, Braelynn AnnMarie, September 23. Brandon attends Peru State College and majors in criminal justice.



Jasmine Douglas-Reese's sorority, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated, won the Outstanding Greek Chapter Award at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Jasmine is vice president. She attends UNL and majors in sociology.

Abdul Mir received his U.S. citizenship October 28. Abdul attends the University of Nebraska at Omaha where he majors in pre-medicine.

Shantel Thompson was inducted into Alpha Kappa Delta Honors Society for Sociology. She attends the University of Nebraska at Omaha and majors in criminal justice.

Nicole Gaughan is part of the Student Council for Exceptional Students at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. She majors in education.

Audrianna Edmonds has a sculpture (pictured at right) on display in the office of MultiCultural Affairs at Creighton University. She majors in justice & society.



EducationQuest Foundation is a private, nonprofit organization with a mission to improve access to higher education in Nebraska - and proud sponsor of KnowHow2GONEbraska.