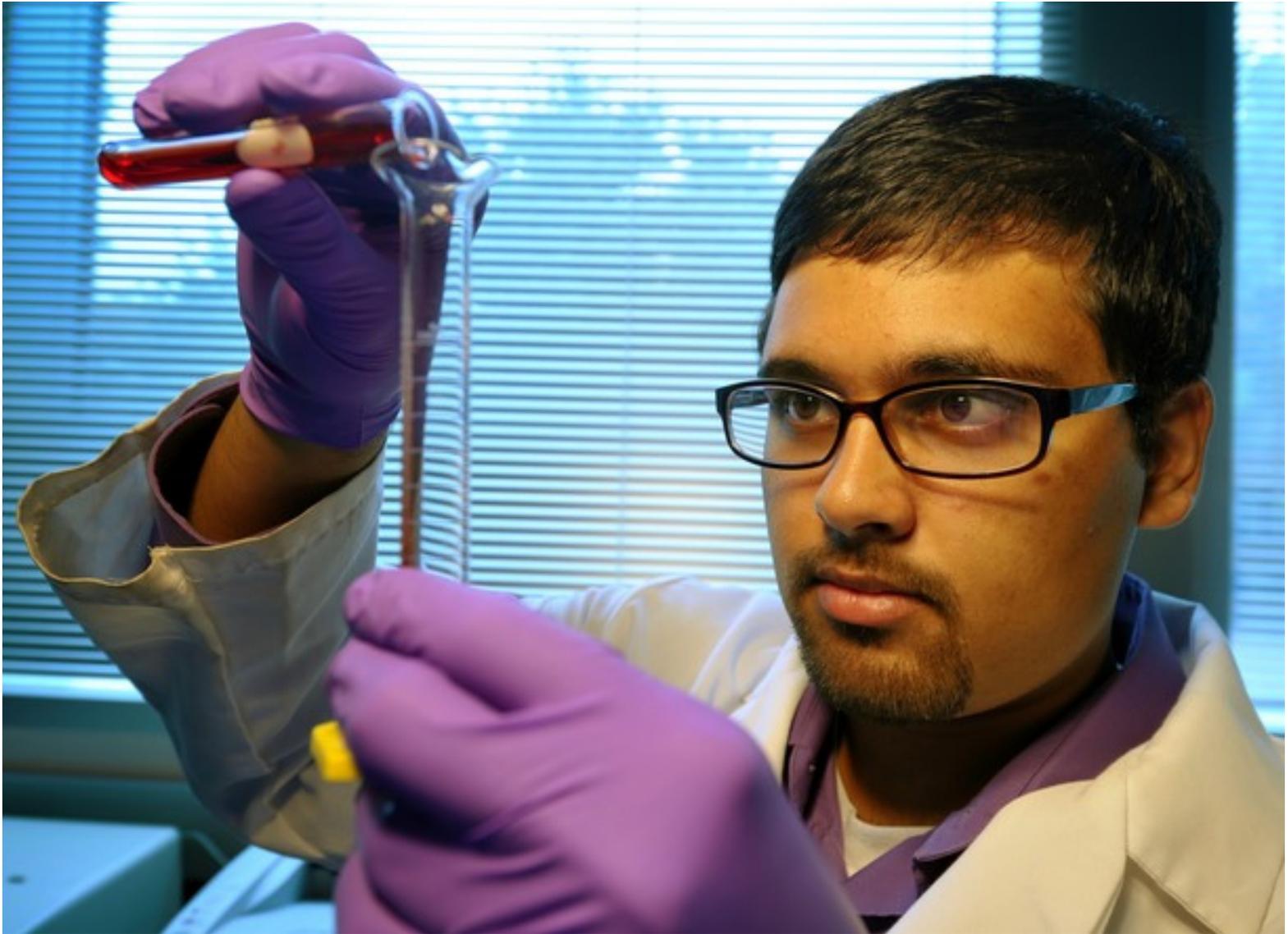


NEW COLLEGE GRADUATES WITH DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS SHARE A PASSION FOR LEARNING



BY DIANE SMITH
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Danielle Miles is about to learn what it's like to graduate.

The 20-year-old dropped out of high school at 16 after struggling at several campuses, including L.D. Bell and Trinity high schools and an alternative school. At 17, she became a single mom.

Today, she will take part in her first graduation ceremony when she gives a keynote speech at the Tarrant County College commencement.

"There was a time when I didn't go to any school at all," Miles said. "I was living an adult life and I didn't fit in anywhere."

A desire to help her daughter gave Miles the first push to get an education. At TCC, she also realized that she loves to learn.

Miles, who completed her credits for an associate degree in December at TCC Northwest Campus, is among the thousands of students taking part in college graduation ceremonies starting this weekend. The University of Texas at Arlington, the University of North Texas, Texas Christian University and other colleges are also holding events today and throughout the weekend.

The Class of 2012 graduates as the economy improves -- the national unemployment rate was 8.1 percent in April -- and as experts ponder the value of an educa-

tion amid rising tuition.

But even with the financial concerns, many new graduates say higher learning is important simply because people grow when exposed to new ideas.

"You have motivation," Miles said. "You are getting to go to class every day to learn about things that interest you."

From dropout to
an associate's degree

Miles wasn't thinking about a college degree in high school. She was struggling with emotional issues and was not motivated to learn. When she did focus on schoolwork, she was quick and seemed

to naturally enjoy English classes. But she couldn't focus for long.

"I was really bored in school," Miles said. "Everything was really slow-paced for me."

Miles didn't encounter those hurdles in college. She learned to manage her bouts with depression and social anxiety. She discovered that she is good at math. She found a passion for volunteering and getting involved -- she was president of the Cornerstone Honors Program and vice president of leadership for Phi Theta Kappa Alpha Delta Delta.

After graduation, Miles will pursue two degrees at UNT, where she has been accepted into the Honors College.

She understands how hard it is for a young person who doesn't fit into the high school setting.

"Sometimes there are people in high school who dream of not being in high school anymore -- that have to deal with issues far beyond high school," she said.

Still, Miles' advice for high schoolers contemplating dropping out is to consider the hurdles it can cause in the long run. She said that even though she excelled at TCC, many colleges still notice when a person didn't finish high school.

"It's going to affect you throughout your entire life, the choice you made to drop out," she said.

A second bachelor's degree at the age of 20

Pinaki Bose will pick up a Bachelor of Science in chemistry Sunday when he walks across the stage at the University of Texas at Arlington's College Park Center.

It will be his second graduation in less than a year -- last December he took home a Bachelor of Science with honors in biochemistry and minors in mathematics and biology.

"I was in the last class to graduate at Texas Hall, and I will be in the first class to graduate in the College Park Center," said Bose, 20.

His next stop is Boston University, where he'll go straight into a doctorate program.

"I'm interested in doing drug-related research and treating human disease and disorders," he said.

Bose has a lifelong knack for science that

runs in the family. As a middle schooler, he was profiled in the Star-Telegram when his science fair project competed in the 2004 Discovery Channel Young Scientist Challenge. His younger sister, Shree, won the Google Global Science Fair last year.

Brother and sister will both study in Boston. Shree Bose is set to graduate from Fort Worth Country Day School and then head to Harvard University, Pinaki Bose said.

He works to get more young people interested in science by serving as a science fair mentor and webmaster for the Fort Worth Regional Science Fair.

"It's very natural to be curious," he said, adding that science offers hands-on opportunities that build on young people's desire to explore.

Bose, who plays the piano and is a member of the Bengali Association of Dallas-Fort Worth, said the key to college success is for students to study topics they like. "They need to find something they are passionate about."

Continuing the family tradition at UNT

Samuel Williamson's family was bleeding Mean Green before UNT even adopted the nickname in the 1960s.

When Williamson graduates with a master's degree this weekend, it will continue a 100-year family connection that began when his great-grandfather came to the Denton school in 1912. Back then, it was called North Texas Normal College.

"I think it is one of those things that naturally evolves," said Williamson, 29. "There's a lot of family tradition."

In the 1940s and 1950s, his grandfather Delwin Williamson attended the school for undergraduate and graduate degrees in industrial technology. His grandmother Ruth Williamson earned an undergraduate degree in education there in the 1940s.

Williamson's dad, Tim, worked and earned a master's degree in industrial technology in the mid-1980s. His sister, Emily Williamson McGill, earned an undergraduate degree in sociology in 2006 and a master's in public administration in 2008.

Williamson's brother-in-law, Kevin McGill, earned a degree in philosophy from UNT in 2007. His uncle, David, is an associate professor in sociology, and his mother, Celia, is vice provost for educational in-

THE CLASS OF 2012

Thousands of area college students will get degrees or certificates this month during commencement ceremonies:

Tarrant County College District:
4,667 (associates degree or certificates of completion)

Texas Christian University: 1,487

Texas Wesleyan University:
about 180 (undergraduates only)

University of North Texas: 4,025

University of Texas at Arlington:
4,406

novation.

The pursuit of education has been a long-running theme in Williamson's family. He notes his grandmother attended college.

"It's not that uncommon today; in 1912, it was rare to have such a push," he said.

If it hadn't been for UNT's new graduate program in innovations studies, Williamson would have been an anomaly in the family -- his undergraduate degree is from the University of Texas at Austin. He graduated in 2009 with a bachelor's in visual arts and discovered a discouraging job market. Williamson worked in the Peace Corps in 2007-2009 and then sought a graduate degree.

"It's a really gratifying accomplishment to be done," he said. "It was hard but it was worth the effort."

Read more here: <http://www.star-telegram.com/2012/05/11/3954771/new-college-graduates-with-diverse.html#storylink=cpy>