Lupita Escandon has heard her fair share of “nos.” The mother of three young children had faced plenty of obstacles in balancing life at home with her dream of embarking on a career path for the betterment of her family and herself. “Mom’s going to have awkward hours and all of that,” she explains. “Honestly, a lot of us don’t do it because we get a lot of nos.”

But when the petrochemical industry gave her a resounding “yes,” she went for it.

When Lupita decided to return to school two years ago—uncertain in her ideal future career path—she found the Process Technology program at San Jacinto College to learn the ins and outs of how to be an operating engineer and the safety practices at refining and petrochemical manufacturing facilities. “I took it and I ran with it,” she recalled.

Lupita knew she wanted a career she could challenge herself with and earn enough money to make the years of juggling school and tasks at home worth it.

“We chose [Process Technology] as a dream, it’s a career,” Lupita said of her and fellow women and working moms. “It’s something that we want to do to fulfill our dream, our family’s dream, and it makes us confident to know that we can go out there and do it because a lot of other women are doing it as well.”



San Jacinto Process Technology student Lupita Escandon with her husband and three kids.

Gabriel Mckinzie, one of Lupita's peers, plays a big part in making sure students like her take advantage of the abundance of opportunities the school provides to help them succeed in a rapidly changing and expanding industry.

"All of our professors are top-notch," Gabriel said. "They actually bring equipment back from their previous companies and share them with the students. 'Hey, this is what a valve wrench is. This is a smart pig. This is what it's used for. This is what you're going to see out in the field.'"

Gabriel is president of the Process Technology Club, a student-led organization that aims to provide its members the tools and knowledge to increase their chances of finding a career in the industry. As president, Gabriel takes charge in welcoming in companies such as ExxonMobil and LyondellBasell to conduct mock interviews with students right on the spot for internships.

And for Gabriel, the club also means an opportunity to give back and help fellow students like Lupita reach their highest potential.

He has co-founded two scholarships, one of which Lupita was awarded. “We all sat down, came together, and brought this to the chairman’s attention,” Gabriel said. “He thought it was a great idea as a way for all of us to be able to give back to the program and to the students who are getting ready to step into the industry.”

Scholarships like this are important to student parents like Lupita and Gabriel, and Congress has taken notice, increasing national funding for the Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) program from $15 million to $50 million a year.



Gabriel McKinzie, President of the Process Technology Program at San Jacinto, is a full-time parent and student.

The San Jacinto College program recognizes that graduating is only a piece of the journey. Securing a well-paying job in a highly competitive economy is what really matters. From organizing all-day plant tours for its students to offering class credits for attending industry seminars, the program has excelled in encouraging and preparing its graduating classes to go straight from the classroom to the job.

“Having an opportunity to grow into a leader and finding success in the petrochemical industry has been very rewarding. I’m very excited for what is to come,” Gabriel said.

This September, San Jacinto is opening a new $60 million, 151,000-square foot Center for Petrochemical, Energy and Technology (CPET), developed in collaboration with petrochemical industry leaders, including Dow Chemical and INEOS. The facility will be the largest petrochemical training hub in the Gulf Coast Region, featuring electrical technology labs, an 8,000 square-foot glycol distillation unit to teach process operations and other elements of leading industry technology.

Although Lupita will only get to experience CPET for a semester before she graduates in December, she believes the hands-on facility will make her even more confident going into the workforce. “It does build confidence and being a woman as well … it comes to a point where you no longer see male or female,” she said. “It’s just simply amazing to be a part of it.”



Lupita Escandon and her peers pictured at one of the many plant facility tours San Jacinto College regularly organizes for students in the program.

“San Jacinto continues to showcase the benefit of industry-community college partnerships, which is highlighted by the opening of the CPET," said Adam Ali, workforce development & technical programs manager at American Fuel & Petrochemical Manufacturers. “Their ongoing commitment to the students and the community is crucial in developing the skilled and diverse workforce needed for the future.”

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