

SAN JACINTO COLLEGESM CareerFocus

Fall 2025 • Volume 6 • Issue 3

BREAKING BARRIERS ONE DANCE STEP AT A TIME



THIS PROMISE PARTNER

HELPS STUDENTS STAY ON TRACK



BIOTECHNOLOGY PROGRAM

OFFERS HANDS-ON LEARNING

Questions about San Jacinto College programs and services described in this publication should be directed to the Contact Center at 281-998-6150. Comments or questions about the publication can be directed to the San Jacinto College External Relations Department at 281-998-6152.

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About San Jacinto College

Surrounded by monuments of history, evolving industries, maritime enterprises of today, and the space age of tomorrow, San Jacinto College has served the people of East Harris County, Texas, since 1961. The College is ranked second in the nation among more than 1,100 community colleges, as designated by the Aspen Institute and was named an Achieving the Dream Leader College of Distinction in 2020. As a Hispanic-Serving Institution that spans five campuses, plus an online college, San Jacinto College serves approximately 45,000 credit and non-credit students annually. It offers more than 200 degrees and certificates across eight major areas of study that put students on a path to transfer to four-year institutions or enter the workforce. The College is fiscally sound, holding bond ratings of AA+ by Standard & Poor's and Aa2 by Moody's.

For more information about San Jacinto College, visit sanjac.edu.

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NEWS AND NOTES

FROM AROUND THE COLLEGE

COMPASSION IN ACTION CONFERENCE SPOTLIGHTS MENTAL HEALTH

With one out of five U.S. adults experiencing mental illness each year*, there's never been a more critical time for nurses to put on their oxygen masks first.

San Jacinto College's Compassion in Action nursing conference in June taught future nurses how to provide compassionate, evidence-based care to individuals with mental health needs while also focusing on their own self-care, resilience, and emotional well-being.

The half-day conference drew 500 nursing students College-wide and presenters from Memorial Hermann and HCA hospital partners.



Students like Frederique Yombo found the conference invaluable as they prepare to enter the workforce. Yombo, an associate degree nursing student, plans to work in the intensive care unit while pursuing her Bachelor of Science in Nursing at San Jac next.

"I learned to recognize signs that a patient might be in distress and to recognize signs that I am burnt out and need to reach out for help," Yombo said.

This first-ever College-wide nursing conference allowed students to meet peers across nursing programs while equipping them to care for a growing population of patients with mental health diagnoses. ■

**Source: National Alliance on Mental Illness*

Scan the QR code to learn more about San Jac's nursing programs.



Judy Harrison takes the oath of office.



Larry Wilson serves another term on Board.

HARRISON, WILSON WIN TRUSTEE SEATS

San Jacinto College's Board of Trustees election in May ended in victories for Judy Harrison and incumbent Larry Wilson.

Harrison won Position 3 with 51.42% of votes, while Wilson was re-elected to Position 4 with 60.77%.

A former San Jac faculty member for nearly 40 years, Harrison brings extensive College experience to the Board. Wilson, a trustee for 18 years, continues his service with proven leadership and institutional knowledge.

Position 5 remains vacant following the passing of longtime trustee John Moon Jr. in July. Trustees are reviewing applicants and will confirm an appointee at their Nov. 3 meeting.

The Board of Trustees sets policies, approves budgets, and oversees College growth to ensure San Jac meets community workforce and education needs. Trustees serve six-year terms.

Wilson was sworn in on June 2, and Harrison on June 17. ■

CANCER DATA MANAGEMENT PROGRAM EXPANDS NATIONWIDE

San Jacinto College has expanded its nationally recognized cancer data management program to students across the U.S., helping meet the rising demand for oncology data specialists as cancer cases increase nationwide.

Oncology data specialists play a vital role in improving cancer research, treatment, and prevention by tracking patient histories, diagnoses, and outcomes.

The College's program — the first in the U.S. accredited by the National Cancer Registrars Association and the only one of its kind in Texas — has earned praise for producing job-ready graduates. Many students go on to work in hospitals, public health, or remotely, earning competitive salaries without the time or cost of a four-year degree.

With this 100% online program, San Jac continues to lead in workforce training that saves lives, making the community proud and helping families near and far. ■

Scan the QR code to learn more about the cancer data management program.



BIOTECHNOLOGY PROGRAM OFFERS HANDS-ON LEARNING

By Neesha Hosein

As Houston's biotechnology sector grows, so does the need for trained technicians.

The San Jacinto College Center for Biotechnology celebrated its grand opening Sept. 26 at the Generation Park Campus. This state-of-the-art facility marks an exciting milestone in advancing biotechnology teaching, research, and training opportunities.

The term "biotechnology" may sound complex, but San Jac offers students a new way to look at biology, providing hands-on training for careers in biomanufacturing and lab environments — no advanced science background required.

What is biotechnology?

Biotechnology is the use of biological systems and living organisms to develop useful products including those that improve human health, with applications ranging from medications like Ozempic to advanced treatments such as chimeric antigen receptor or CAR T-cell therapy.

The program places an emphasis on practical techniques rather than a focus on theory, preparing students to work behind the scenes in sterile, highly regulated environments.

"It's amazing that we can use cells to grow proteins of interest for patients who need it," said Kevin Rodriguez, South Campus biotechnology instructor. "This is where patients battling a disease like cancer can have their own immune cells reprogrammed to fight the disease in a targeted fashion, unlike chemotherapy, which is known to have a lot of side effects."

It's all about how to use what is known about the natural world and apply these concepts to helping people.

Turning science into treatment

Biomanufacturing technicians play a crucial role in producing vaccines, cell



San Jac's biotechnology program

therapies, and other biologic treatments used in modern medicine.

Technicians help manufacture personalized therapies without direct patient contact, making this field ideal for those who want to make a meaningful impact without working in traditional clinical roles.

"The people who do the best are those who truly feel a calling to help someone, whether it's cancer, vaccines, or immunocompromised patients, among other things," Rodriguez said. "A lot of our students are realizing a career in science is actually more attainable than they thought. You don't have to be proficient in science. We can help with that. We teach in a way that makes it easy to understand."

Supply and demand mean career growth opportunities

Rodriguez believes the Texas Medical Center makes Houston a huge draw for this field.

"Most companies that manufacture these types of drugs or products want to come to Houston to be close to the thousands of patients who travel to the medical center every day from around the world," he said.

Local biomanufacturing facilities can reduce wait times significantly for patients who need time-sensitive treatments. When therapies like cell or gene treatments are made locally, they don't need to be shipped long distances in specialized containers via air or ground. Local production also reduces the chances of delays, storage temperature fluctuations, or logistical issues during transport.

The work environment compares to that of a surgical technician, requiring sterile or secured cleanroom areas with multiple layers of protection that are required to safeguard against microbes.

Start fresh or build on existing knowledge

San Jac's biotechnology program accommodates various levels of learners. Beginners and those who are pursuing or already have higher degrees in biotechnology can obtain hands-on experience outside of academic studies, maximizing workplace readiness. ■

Scan the QR code to learn more about the **biotechnology program**.



AFTER DELAYING HER OWN DEGREE, THIS PROMISE PARTNER HELPS STUDENTS STAY ON TRACK

By Courtney Morris

Christeyne Phan should have been celebrating when she paid her college tuition. Instead, her heart sank. There was no money left for books, supplies, or even gas to get to classes.

Heartbroken, the 18-year-old had to withdraw from school. While classmates picked up student IDs and joined campus clubs, she turned to job ads.

Decades later, at the San Jacinto College Foundation gala, Phan felt an instant connection to students who shared similar struggles.

“As someone who had to delay college, I understand deeply how lack of resources can derail a young person’s path,” she said.

But students at the gala also shared how the Promise @ San Jac Scholarship is covering their tuition and books, allowing them to pursue a degree debt-free.

“Promise is fulfilling my dreams, my career, and my future,” one San Jac student said.

Connecting with the scholarship’s mission, Phan became a Promise Partner on the spot.

Returning to school

After her early disappointment, it took years before Phan found the courage — or resources — to apply to college again. Life moved on: She started a family and continued working.

The dream persisted, though.

“I always knew I wanted to finish what I’d started,” she said.

Finally, with two young kids at home, Phan enrolled in an online degree program to



Christeyne Phan and her daughter Rayne

show them the importance of persevering and learning.

“It’s not just about qualifying for a job,” she said. “It’s about finding your voice, expanding your potential, and creating opportunities that weren’t accessible before.”

In 2011, Phan graduated with an Associate of Arts in health care administration and pharmacy practice. Today she’s a vice president of sales, operations, and strategy for Powerforce Inc., a transportation and logistics company. While education advanced her career, she never forgot the barriers she overcame to get there.

Giving others a chance

Phan had no connection to San Jac before her daughter Rayne began attending through a softball scholarship in 2022. Though not a Promise Scholar, Rayne thrived at the South Campus, from the softball field to the biology lab.

When Phan learned about the Promise @ San Jac Scholarship — the opportunity for

in-district high school grads to earn a debt-free degree — she wanted to open doors for others.

Since 2020, Promise @ San Jac has helped more than 6,700 students attend college debt-free, many the first in their families.

“Seeing firsthand how San Jac supported students like my daughter, I didn’t hesitate to become a Promise Partner,” Phan said.

Embracing detours

Without a strong support system in her youth, Phan had to find her own way. Life was messy, and she had to delay her dreams. But she embraces her story and wants others to find hope from it.

“Your story doesn’t have to look like anyone else’s to be meaningful,” she said. “In fact, it’s often the detours, the delays, and the challenges that shape the strongest, most resilient individuals.”

Her encouragement for Promise Scholars?

“You’re not alone,” she said. “There are people like me cheering for you, believing in you, and investing in your potential, not because of what you can do but because of who you are and who you’re becoming.”

Phan once lacked access or resources — now she’s giving them to others. In fact, she enjoys paying it forward through Promise.

“I’ve been fortunate to find success,” she said. “It feels not only meaningful but necessary to give back and support a program that changes lives.” ■

Scan the QR code to learn more about becoming a **Promise Partner**.



COUTURE FOR A CAUSE GALA

Join us for the San Jacinto College Foundation’s 25th anniversary gala **Friday, April 24**: Couture for a Cause. Seats and sponsorships are available now! The gala benefits the Promise @ San Jac Scholarship.

Scan the QR code to learn more about the **gala**.



BREAKING BARRIERS

ONE DANCE STEP AT A TIME

| By Melissa Trevizo

When Megan Tamez entered the San Jacinto College South Campus, she carried with her years of feeling left out and underestimated. Today, the 19-year-old will graduate this December as part of the first cohort from the College's innovative dance instructor program.

For Tamez, who is on the autism spectrum, dance became more than movement — it allowed her to express herself without words. During the pandemic, she found an outlet in ballet, which has remained her favorite style.

"I wish that everyone could see that people with autism can actually dance," she said. "Not a lot of people see them."

Tamez's discouragement from a high school dance class turned into motivation when her mother found another opportunity after graduation. In spring 2024, Neida Tamez met with dance professor Jamie Williams, who mentioned the new certificate program.

The timing felt like an answered prayer.

"I believe Megan is where God wanted her to be," her mother said.

Built for accessibility

Williams and fellow dance professor Jennifer Salter built accessibility into the program, which features customized coursework in industry-standard facilities. Students like Tamez can focus on dance instruction without typical core classes and submit work in flexible formats.

"We didn't want there to be any barriers to student success," Williams said. "Most importantly, we encourage students to communicate with us about their specific needs. If there is any way that we can help them be successful, we do it."

The program culminates in two semester-long internships at local dance studios.



Megan Tamez

Last semester, Tamez worked with preschool children at Amy Blake Academy of Dance, and this fall, special needs children at Kennedy Dance Theater.

"I want to be a good teacher. To help other students. To help other people," she said. "Maybe one day I could be an instructor for kids with disabilities because I understand what they need."

Finding belonging

Salter has witnessed substantial changes in Tamez's development throughout the program.

"We have seen Megan grow not only in her movement ability but more importantly in her ability to communicate with others and articulate academic ideas," Salter said.

Tamez also found a sense of belonging that she missed in past experiences.

"When the other girls introduced themselves to me, I was like, 'Oh, I'm not going to be alone,'" she said.

Her mother added, "For the first time ever, Megan was included in the text group, included in all the plans. Everybody was so welcoming."

The welcoming environment wasn't accidental.

"It has not been a surprise to us that anyone, including Megan, would feel welcomed and cared for in our program," Salter said. "Our students have always been kind and inclusive, which we value deeply."

"I want to be a good teacher. To help other students. To help other people. Maybe one day I could be an instructor for kids with disabilities because I understand what they need."

— Megan Tamez, dance instructor student



Megan and company

For Williams, the program represents a broader shift toward inclusivity in dance.

“We believe and teach that dance is for everyone,” she said. “Artists with different abilities and backgrounds contribute new perspectives that are redefining what dance is and who it’s for.”

Drawing from her experience, Tamez shared what she would tell other families considering San Jac: “I would recommend it for all kids and kids with disabilities. I feel like it’s a great opportunity for them to learn and not feel like they can’t do it.”

As one of the first students to complete the program, Tamez is breaking barriers and paving the way for future students.

“In high school, I told Megan, ‘If you want to see change, you need to be the change,’” her mother said.

Now, Tamez is doing exactly that, expressing herself through dance and helping others do the same.

“We are so proud of this program that we have built but even more proud of the students doing the work,” Salter said. “We cannot wait to watch Megan walk across the stage as our first graduate.” ■

Scan the QR code to learn more about San Jac’s dance programs.



Megan and Neida Tamez

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

If you love dancing and inspiring others, you can turn that passion into a rewarding career. The dance instructor certificate program offers:

- **Fast-track completion:** 41 credit hours over three semesters
- **Easy entry:** No prerequisites or general education requirements
- **Focused courses:** Pedagogy, early childhood education, wellness, technology, choreography, and dance technique
- **Flexible pathway:** Stackable credential that can lead to an associate’s degree

RUSSELL SWAPS LATE-NIGHT STUDY SESSIONS FOR REAL-WORLD PROBLEM SOLVING

| By Melissa Trevizo

Joseph Russell woke up before dawn — not for his San Jacinto College classes but to pick up a fixer-upper Toyota Camry he bought for \$200.

“I needed something fuel-efficient to get me back and forth to work and school,” he said. “It’s got a whole bunch of problems that I’m excited to work on.”

That same enthusiasm for fixing things has become the foundation for Russell’s career path in instrumentation technology, a field focused on designing, developing, installing, and maintaining devices and systems that measure and control physical variables such as temperature, pressure, flow, and level.

The 19-year-old graduated early from Santa Fe High School in December 2023, having spent his junior and senior years in a dual-enrollment program through College of the Mainland. After experimenting with engineering and process technology, he transferred to San Jac in 2024 to focus on instrumentation.

“I’d stay up all night doing just two homework questions in engineering,” Russell said. “Operations appealed to me more, but the management responsibilities didn’t fit me.”

His older brother, an instrumentation technician, introduced him to the field. Russell’s knack for hands-on problem-solving started long before he entered a college classroom. Growing up, he and his dad worked on motorcycles together, and he even revived a 1998 Suzuki Samurai.

“My dad was a carpenter, so I’ve done some construction too,” he said. “I’m not afraid of manual labor.”

Finding the right fit at San Jac

At San Jac, Russell found the hands-on approach he needed to succeed.

“I can’t learn just by reading,” he said. “When professors actually get us up out of our chairs to examine the equipment, walk us through how it works, and show us all the different parts — that’s been invaluable.”

Thanks to that practical training, Russell landed an apprenticeship with INEOS Olefins and Polymers in August. He learned about the opportunity through his class with instructor O.V. Gamble.

“Russell is an exemplary student in terms of his keen desire to learn and understand the craft of Instrumentation,” Gamble said. “He set a positive example through his dedication in class, and he always went the extra mile by asking questions and taking extensive notes to deepen his understanding.”

Real-world experience

As an apprentice instrumentation and electrical technician, Russell works on waste treatment systems, steam lines, train loading operations, and barge dock equipment.

“Having this background and solid foundation has helped me a lot,” he said. “I don’t think there’s been anything I’ve learned at San Jac that I haven’t already applied at work.”

Balancing work and school requires flexibility. Some days, Russell leaves work 30 minutes early to make an evening class — a far better arrangement than when he worked 40-50 hours per week while attending school.



Joseph Russell

Looking ahead

Russell expects to complete his instrumentation degree in May 2026. His apprenticeship experience will also count toward a required troubleshooting course. His career goal is straightforward: advance from apprentice to technician and eventually reach the top pay scale in his field.

Long-term, he is considering relocating to a cooler climate, though INEOS’s benefits package might convince him to stay in Texas.

“I’m 19, and I’ve got options,” he said. “I understand that I can change my mind. I’ve allowed myself room to grow and pursue whatever I want.”

Advice for future students

When plant systems malfunction, instrumentation technicians often become the go-to problem solvers because of their specialized expertise in measurement and control systems.

“We’re the technical experts everyone turns to,” Russell said. “When complex issues arise, we have the knowledge and skills to fix them — it’s empowering to be the person who understands these systems.”

Despite the challenges, Russell’s enthusiasm remains strong.

“You’re doing specialized work that few people can master,” he said. “It’s a fantastic career — I’m loving it so far, and I know I’ll continue to love it. You need a passion for problem-solving and innovation.” ■

Scan the QR code to learn more about **instrumentation technology.**



STUDENT BALANCES BEAUTY, BUSINESS, AND BOOKS

By Melissa Trevizo

Ziyon Robertson is busy, and she likes it that way. The 20-year-old San Jacinto College student launched her first business during COVID-19. She models and is already a licensed esthetician — all while working full time as a personal care assistant and pursuing her natural science degree.

“If you enjoy what you’re doing, you won’t really see it as a job,” Robertson said. “It’s more like, ‘I get to go to my work today, and I love it.’”

Robertson’s journey to San Jac began two years ago when she entered the unfamiliar world of traditional education after being homeschooled by her mother and grandmother, both licensed teachers.

“The public school world was just unknown for me,” she said. “It was a bit difficult to get acclimated to starting off, but now I’ve finally got some grounding under me.”



Ziyon Robertson

Courtesy of Ziyon Robertson

The youngest of four, Robertson credits her family’s educational approach with teaching her skills beyond traditional academics.

“We learned entrepreneurship and how to do taxes,” she said. “I started my first business during COVID, selling celebration yard signs.”

Robertson’s interest in health care runs in the family. Her father, a nurse practitioner with a doctorate in family practice, operates two clinics where Robertson worked as a medical receptionist and gained exposure to both the business and medical sides of health care.

But it wasn’t only the procedures that captured her interest — it was the patients’ satisfaction.

“I think what got me most was the people’s reactions when they got the treatments they wanted,” Robertson said. “I would love to make people feel good about themselves and make them happy in their own skin in the most natural way possible.”

That passion led her to pursue San Jac’s facial specialist certificate in 2024. The program gave her practical skills in skin care and esthetics while providing a steppingstone toward her goal of becoming an aesthetic nurse.

Despite her busy schedule, Robertson has found strong support at San Jac, particularly from cosmetology program director Cornelia Angelle.

“Ms. Angelle is just such a great spirit and has a great personality. You can tell that she wants all her students to succeed,” she said.

One unexpected benefit of attending San Jac with her sister Sa’Rah, who was



Facial specialist certificate

enrolled in the culinary program, is that they could trade services. Both programs are in the same North Campus building.

“She would bring me food, and I’d ask if she wanted facials,” she said. “Classmates were jealous, asking where I was getting this food from, and I’d say, ‘I’m not telling you — it’s just for me!’”

Robertson plans to transfer to Texas Southern University or Prairie View A&M University next year. Her advisor encouraged her to complete more credit hours at San Jac to reduce her university time and get the most bang for her buck.

Her goal is to earn a biology degree before pursuing medical school, aiming to work alongside plastic surgeons.

“As a nurse, I’ll have the credentials to actually be hands-on with patients, and I’ll be able to be in the field and assist more,” she said.

Robertson recommends San Jac to other students, particularly those still exploring their options.

“San Jac exceeded my expectations with counseling, tutoring, and everything like that,” she said.

Robertson credits her mother Reyna and siblings Sa’Rah, Reyna, and Quinten along with her faith in God for being her biggest support through life’s challenges.

“My mom has just been the rock of our foundation right now as a family,” she said.

Her advice for fellow students reflects her philosophical approach to life’s journey: “Stay grounded. Life isn’t easy, but don’t make it harder for yourself. Just live life as it comes, day to day.” ■

7 TIPS TO STAND OUT IN A JOB INTERVIEW

By Courtney Morris

Relaxing might be the last thing you're doing when interviewers are firing questions at you across a conference room table.

But while you're dripping sweat, remember this: They're trying to get to know the person behind the resume. And you're learning whether this job is the right fit.

San Jacinto College **career and transfer advisor Denise Vasquez** shares seven ways to ace your job interview and stand out from other applicants — no sweat!



Denise Vasquez

the “but” are most important: “I have this weakness, *but* this is how I’m overcoming it.”

1 How should I research a company?

A: Although the “About Us” webpage is a good start, do a deep dive into the company’s mission and values. Don’t just regurgitate this during the interview. Instead, align what you read to your own skills and mindset. Understand their product or services. Read their Google reviews. Look through their job platform and see if they offer leadership roles. Tie this to where you see yourself in five years.

Other valuable resources: LinkedIn allows you to research similar roles and the interviewers, while Glassdoor can provide insight into company culture, the interviewing process, and even common interview questions.

2 How can I turn limited work experience into strong talking points?

A: Focus on transferable skills. Every experience outside the traditional work experience allows you to develop skills. Consider your involvement, extracurricular activities, etc., to determine what skills you used and how you can include them.

After identifying your skills, prepare compelling stories using the STAR method: Situation, Task, Action, and Result. Don’t just list what you did — highlight what you

learned and how you can apply it to the new role.

3 What’s your advice on using LinkedIn or a personal portfolio?

A: LinkedIn is an online resume and a popular place for recruiters looking for qualified candidates. It’s important to optimize your profile with a professional photo, not a selfie. The details you provide in the experience section should expand on your resume bullet points, not match exactly. Be an active and engaged member too! LinkedIn networking could lead to a good job opportunity.

When building a personal portfolio, remember quality over quantity. The projects you present should relate to the job and include details about the impact. Also, practice your portfolio so you’re ready to present it.

4 What’s a surprising way to stand out during the interview?

A: Interviewers often ask, “Do you have any questions for us?” This is the perfect opportunity to share your knowledge of the company. Ask questions like “What challenges is the company facing, and how can my new role here help alleviate them?” or “I see you’ve completed [project name]. What other successes can I see being accomplished here in the future?”

5 How can I answer questions about weaknesses?

A: It’s normal to be afraid of saying something you shouldn’t. You don’t want to say, “I struggle with time management,” when you’re interviewing for a role that values this skill. When choosing a weakness, choose one that isn’t crucial for the job.

Employers want to know how self-aware you are and gauge your accountability and growth. I tell students the details after

6 What should I do after the interview?

A: You can make a big impact with a thank-you email. If you jotted notes during the interview, include some of the conversation points. Even better, identify a current challenge the company faces and use your email to introduce a possible solution. One thank-you email can demonstrate critical thinking, initiative, and interest.

7 Any final advice?

A: Always welcome constructive feedback. Continue self-assessment, even after landing the job. Have conversations with leaders about your current work and how you can improve. If more opportunities come up, you might be the first person leadership thinks to promote. ■

JOB PREP 101

Are you a current San Jac student needing career advising?

Email career.centers@sjcd.edu or scan the QR code to learn more about our **career support**.





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