

# Profiles in Success

## Tech-Connect at Texas State Technical College in Waco

Texas State Technical College Waco (TSTC Waco) is one of four colleges comprising the state-supported technical college system in Texas. Historically, TSTC Waco ranks as one of the country's top producers of technical graduates. It is accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools to confer Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degrees, as well as Certificates of Completion. In fact, this year in its 2009 annual report, "Top 100 Associate Degree Producers," *Community College Week* ranked TSTC Waco as first in the United States among two-year colleges for awarding the most associate degrees in the Engineering-Related Technologies and Technicians category. Within the state of Texas, TSTC ranked first for the number of degrees conferred in two categories: Precision Production, and Computer and Information Sciences & Support Services.



TSTC Waco is also home to Tech-Connect, a technical dual credit program designed to give young people the opportunity to earn college credit while they are still in high school. Students may take two college classes each semester starting their junior year, in any of TSTC Waco's six technical career clusters: agriculture, information technology and telecommunications, engineering and manufacturing, health and sciences, business, commerce and service, or transportation. High school students are not limited to technical classes and some core academic classes, such as English or psychology, are also available to them.



The Tech-Connect program confers many benefits upon high school students. First, by taking classes in high school students save considerable time and money in earning their Associate's degrees. Students can earn up to 36 hours if they take two classes every semester beginning the summer between their sophomore and junior year and continue to take two classes each semester through graduation. This provides Tech-Connect students with a total of 12 college classes, a considerable head start toward earning an AAS degree or a Certificate of Completion. In addition, TSTC Waco waives tuition and fees for students taking classes through Tech-Connect, leaving them only books, parking and supplies to pay for themselves. Finally, the Tech-Connect experience eases high school students into the college curriculum, providing an excellent introduction and transition to college life.

Tech-Connect is largely funded with state general revenue funds. Some federal funding is available to pay for travel expenses related to the program, approximately \$7,000 in fiscal year 2009. The college has been serving dual

credit students for nearly 10 years and the Tech-Connect department was established in 2007 to enable the college to better serve its high school students. In this relatively short period of time, dual credit enrollment is increasing by leaps and bounds. For example, in 2007 approximately 300 Waco-area high school students participated in dual enrollment, a dramatically larger number when compared to the 30 students in the program in 2000. However, the 2008-2009 enrollment was the largest Tech-Connect has seen yet, with approximately 1200 high school students taking TSTC Waco classes through Tech-Connect. TSTC Waco has a success rate after graduation of more than 90 percent.

Students are eligible to participate in Tech-Connect if they score at least 2200 on the TAKS in math, or 2200 in Language Arts with a writing sub-score of three or higher. They are also eligible if their SAT score is 1070 combined with at least 500 in math or verbal scores. Another measure for Tech-Connect eligibility is an ACT score of 23 composite, with 19 or higher in math or English. For students who do not meet these automatic eligibility requirements, taking Accuplacer, TSTC Waco's placement test, is an option for entry into the Tech-Connect Program. Tech-Connect offers high school students a low-cost, hands-on college experience—a great way to “get the connection.”





Rey Paul Ramirez is 18 years old and graduated from Connally High School, Waco, Texas, in the spring of 2009. In addition to receiving his high school diploma, Rey successfully completed 17 hours of college credit with a 3.118 GPA through the Tech-Connect program at TSTC Waco. This summer, Rey was registered for nine hours, which will put 26 hours of college credit under his belt as he begins college at TSTC Waco this fall.

Rey heard about the Tech-Connect program through friends. The summer between his junior and senior years he took two classes that he enjoyed so much he signed up for two more the fall of his senior year. Earlier in high school,

Rey had taken a career and technical education class that had exposed him to the world of electronics and ignited a keen interest in electrical systems that he pursued through Tech-Connect. Tech-Connect classes kept Rey interested and motivated to stay with the program. For example, smaller classes with fewer students enabled him to learn more efficiently. In some Tech-Connect classes there were less than 20 students, and interaction with teachers and other students was easy, relaxed, and more enjoyable than what he experienced in larger and more anonymous classes.

Rey notes that his Tech-Connect classes gave him unexpected skills and perspectives that help him far beyond acquiring the valuable subject matter of the classes. Now that high school is behind him, he says he sees that Tech-Connect gave him a pattern and routine each day. Without that, he is not sure he would have had the ambition and drive to push on to postsecondary training. And, he thinks it is unfortunate that many of his friends appear to be far from deciding upon a career. Rey quickly learned that in the Tech-Connect classes, a student must not only come to class each day, but be there on time or risk falling behind because the classes move so quickly. This discipline helped him considerably these past few months in balancing his full-time work schedule and summer college class schedule.





As Rey reflected upon his experience in the Tech-Connect program, he said just being a part of these postsecondary classes was inspiring. Attending classes with people whose ages ranged from 18 to 60 was a totally new experience for the young high school student, and one that grew on him as time went by. He was amused by the general alarm he caused when older students learned he “was only seventeen!” and truly gratified when

he showed he was able to complete some homework assignments faster than anyone else in his class. In his frequency counter lab, Rey completed the final project of building a circuit to convert any given frequency into a decimal format in just four and a half hours—well within the allotted time of 18 hours. Knowing he was at the same learning level as people who were older, with diverse backgrounds and more work experience than Rey gave him confidence. It reinforced the notion that a professional degree in electrical systems was something he could not only achieve, but something at which he could excel.

This fall as he prepares to enter TSTC Waco, Rey Ramirez will register for a dual Associate’s Degree in Electrical Power & Control - Electrical Systems and Instrumentation, Computerized Controls & Robotics - Instrumentation Specialization.

**tech-connect**  
Get the connection.



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