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Two Veterans among Students Honored as 2017 Presidential Scholars

Exemplary students Tiana Gripper, Perla Lara-Escobedo and Tafari Richards were honored as 2017 Presidential Scholars just before they graduated with associate degrees from Compton College in June. The three honors students received their awards at the college's annual Academic Awards Tea. Presidential Scholars represent students who have shown academic strength, singular focus and the desire to reach their highest potential, while overcoming obstacles in the pursuit of their dreams. The Presidential Scholar program recognizes outstanding graduating students who have a 3.7 grade point average or higher. Here are their personal stories of success.

Tiana Gripper

After receiving an honorable discharge from the U.S. Army and returning to college two years ago, Tiana Gripper will graduate in June with an associate degree in psychology. The single mother of four boys earned a 3.9 cumulative GPA and will transfer to California State University, Dominguez Hills to pursue her dream of becoming a therapist or college professor.

Gripper has always been motivated to help people and give back, but her personal struggle with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, depression and anxiety as a result of several deployments in Iraq, strongly impacted her decision to study psychology. Other influences on her educational and career goals were her therapist and Compton College professors. "My therapist had such an impact on my life and recovery," said Gripper. "My professors also awoke a sleeping giant inside of me. I want to pay it forward and have a profound impact on someone else's life."

Gripper credits Compton College for equipping her with the confidence and perseverance she needs to succeed in college and beyond.

Perla Lara-Escobedo

Perla Lara-Escobedo made the decision to enroll in college after serving four years in the U.S. Army. She is now graduating with a 3.7 GPA and will receive her associate degree in administration of justice. Her future plans include continuing her studies at California State University, Dominguez Hills and later applying to the police academy so she can pursue a career in police forensics.

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2017 Presidential Scholars 2-2-2-2

Lara-Escobedo is a single parent who embraced the support Compton College offered through assistance programs such as CalWORKS, the Equal Opportunity Programs and Services, and on-campus employment as a student worker. One of the initial barriers she faced was finding reliable childcare while she was in class, but CalWORKS was able to find a daycare program for her son to attend at no cost. The First Year Experience (FYE) program offered the academic guidance and supportive community she needed to successfully transition from military to college life. “I was grateful to have the chance to join FYE because knowing that I would be with the same group of students and professors for a year helped me quickly adjust to being on campus,” she said. In addition, the program’s university tours opened her eyes to the benefits of attending a four-year university.

She eventually became a FYE peer mentor in addition to serving as a Supplemental Instruction mentor for the math department and student worker in the Transfer Center. These roles afforded her the opportunity to help set up other students for success at Compton College, be a full-time student and provider for her son. “Having all these services available helped me maintain good grades I am grateful for everything this campus does to help students realize their educational goals,” said Lara-Escobedo.

Tafari Richards

Tafari Richards earned her associate degree and a 3.9 GPA after prior attempts at college completion proved unsuccessful. With a newfound determination and the abundant support services available at Compton College, Richards created her success story. She will transfer this fall to California State University, Dominguez Hills to major in human services.

Richards is one of seven children born to immigrant parents. When she was young, they were abandoned by their mother and raised by their grandmother who suffers from mental illness. As a result, Richards found a “home with the wrong crowd” and barely finished high school. This behavior continued well into her twenties until she finally decided to no longer live as a victim of circumstance and do something to better her life.

Richards enrolled once again at Compton College at the age of 29 where Academic Counselor Vanessa Haynes motivated her with these words: “The reward of overcoming the challenge of returning to school and actually graduating will be worth every bit of adversity you have ever been through.” From that point on, something clicked for Richards and she worked hard to earn straight A’s semester after semester. Richards says that Compton College has done so much to influence her life including giving her a chance at a future she never thought was possible.

Photos available online:

Tiana Gripper:

www.compton.edu/adminandoperations/publicrelations/images/2017/TianaGripper.jpg

Perla Lara-Escobedo:

www.compton.edu/adminandoperations/publicrelations/images/2017/PerlaLara-Escobedo.jpg

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2017 Presidential Scholars 3-3-3-3

Tafari Richards:

www.compton.edu/adminandoperations/publicrelations/images/2017/TafariRichards.jpg

About Compton College

Compton College is the community's education solution offering a full complement of transfer and degree courses, as well as career and technical education. Students may earn an associate degree or certificate, transfer to a four-year university or train for a career. Compton College is located at 1111 E. Artesia Boulevard, Compton, CA 90221.

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