



CONTRA
COSTA
COLLEGE

Generational Connections

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The shape of our campus has evolved throughout the years. Almost unrecognizable today, the Student + Administration Building, Fireside Hall and Science Center have replaced the old amphitheater, student quad and LA building (seen in the distance).

75 Years of Excellence!

Established in 1949, we proudly began our journey with the first classes in Spring 1950. Here's to honoring our legacy and embracing the future together!

Look up the definition of a public community college. You'll find: an undergraduate educational institution that provides education and training primarily for students from its local community. CCC has been educating and interacting with its community for 75 years. That time period encompasses multiple generations, so it is perhaps unsurprising that there are strong connections between the college and the families of the individuals who have been educated and/or employed at CCC over these many years. We will be highlighting some of their stories as we celebrate this milestone anniversary.

- Ellen Geringer

In this issue: The Garcia Family



Elvia Ornelas-Garcia has worked at CCC for over 25 years (longer if you count her years tutoring and mentoring in METAS and Puente). Hired initially as a professor in the English Dept., she is currently the Dean of Liberal Arts. She also has been a student at CCC, as have three of her siblings and many of her nieces and nephews. I interviewed Elvia, her sister Rosa, niece Lorena and nephew J. Michael. (A bonus family connection: CCC Counselor Norma Valdez-Jimenez is their cousin.)



Legacy Talks

Passing the Baton from
One Generation to the Next

Did you grow up in the local community?

Elvia

Rosa

Yes, after our family emigrated here from Jalisco, Mexico when we were young. We finished growing up in Richmond and Montalvin.

Lorena

Michael

Yes, in Montalvin and Hercules.

Did you graduate/earn a certificate/transfer?

Elvia

No, I went directly to UC Berkeley.

Lorena

No, because part-way through my first year, I got into a program that gave me the option to go directly to UC Berkeley or after completing the first 2 years here. I took the direct option, which is a big regret.

Michael

Yes, I got an AA, then transferred to SJ State and got my BA. I am here again, taking real estate courses.

Rosa

Yes, I graduated from the Nursing Program. I later completed a BA in nursing at Holy Names University.

Did you attend at CCC? Why did you choose to do so?

Elvia

Yes, I took some summer school classes when I was in high school (I enjoyed several psychology classes I took from Dr Gordon.). My brother Alfredo encouraged me to meet his mentor, Frank Hernandez, who got me involved in the METAS program.

Lorena

Yes. I took College for Kids classes and participated in METAS. After high school, I did one semester here and took summer session classes. I felt comfortable with CCC and its proximity to home. And my aunts were here to help.

Michael

Yes. I actually started college at SF State, but it wasn't for me. I didn't like the city and was unsure about my major, so after a semester I came to CCC. It gave me a chance to regroup. Plus, I have aunts who work here.

Rosa

Yes, I took pre-nursing and then went through the nursing program. My parents encouraged all of their children to continue their education. CCC was close to home and affordable.

Did you work at CCC?

Elvia

I've worked here for over 20 years. Before that, I had tutored for METAS at CCC and worked at College for Kids. When I was in graduate school, I was part of the teaching intern program at CCC and team-taught with Dr. Holly Cordova, who became my mentor.

Lorena

Volunteer work. I was a METAS tutor through all 4 years of my undergraduate years. More recently, I have been a mentor for the Puente program. I had to stop that when I got a new job, but hope to return to it at some point.

Michael

No.

Rosa

Yes, I was a student tutor for anatomy and physiology and microbiology.





How satisfied were you with your experience at CCC?

Elvia

I liked my time here as a student - I had family here and made good connections via the METAS program. CCC changed the trajectory of my whole family.

Lorena

I had good experiences with my teachers. The smaller class sizes were better. There were more opportunities (such as getting more attention from your teachers) that I didn't have at UCB.

Michael

It was a blessing. I got the collegiate education I needed, but didn't feel like I was just a student number. The teachers here have my interests at heart.

Rosa

Very, I have nothing but fond memories. It felt like a community. As an immigrant, I sometimes struggled with my English courses, but the other students were very supportive. The tutoring center helped, too. I felt very nurtured. The college helped me stand on my own and grow.

What is your most positive CCC memory?

Elvia

My classroom experiences were very positive. Classes were small, the teachers knew our names and took the time to know us. I also took classes when working towards my teaching credential. I especially remember a speech class with Mark Frey.

Lorena

A field trip w/Professor Duvall's summer geography class. We went to see an ancient volcano that is in the Bay Area [Sibley Regional Park]. He also offered to take students flying in his small plane.

Michael

School is school, so I'm always learning. I like meeting students from all over the Bay Area, with different backgrounds than mine. I also feel connected to home.

Rosa

I had a baby when I was in the nursing program. My fellow students gave me a baby shower. I felt loved and supported.

Do you remember seeing any of the famous musicians, artists, speakers who have appeared at the college?

Elvia

In recent years, I've seen writers Sandra Cisneros and Reyna Grande, and attended talks by Harris Wood and Duncan Andrade.

Lorena

I think I went to some of the school plays (La Lorena?). More recently, I went to see Cheech Marin.

Michael

I went to a speaker/discussion about African American students and achieving excellence that had been recommended by my African American Studies teacher.

Rosa

I know I went to some of the programs offered at the Performing Arts Center, but no longer remember which ones.

Was there a college employee who had a significant positive influence on your time at CCC?

Elvia

Frank Hernandez, especially; he got me into METAS and when I started tutoring in the program, I discover a love for teaching (I'd thought about becoming a lawyer.) Dr. Cordova and Dr. Gordon were also positive influences.

Lorena

Emanuel Baptiste explained math so well; I learned that I wasn't bad at it. My aunt Elvia was a great mentor. My English wasn't strong, so I struggled with reading/writing. She helped me improve my skills.

Michael

My aunts (Elvia and Norma) were good supports for me. Also, my math teacher, Professor Nguyen helped me discover that I could do math. He told me I didn't need to be a genius, but that I could be successful if I put in the work and practiced. He was right – it really helped when I transferred.

Rosa

I took several English classes with Jean Knox; she was a class act, a wonderful woman. Mable Hom, my microbiology teacher was very nurturing; she encouraged me to consider a career in micro and hired me as a student tutor. In the nursing program, Cheri Etheridge and the other nursing teachers were all very supportive.



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What is something at CCC (not class-related) that you enjoyed being part of?

Elvia

When I was a student, I was pretty focused on my classes. As an employee, I have found a community of supporters, allies and friends. CCC feels like home to me.

Lorena

I played soccer, which was fun.

Michael

I'm not much of a club guy. I have met a lot of people, and made connections and friends. I've enjoyed getting career advice and guidance from older students who are married and have families.

Rosa

I enjoyed going to events such as the Cinco de Mayo festival, and socializing before class in the student cafeteria.

How did attending CCC prepare you for the “real world” & your career?

Elvia

Dr. Cordova's mentorship helped make me a teacher. She modeled all the skills that I would need, including reading student papers together and talking over what and how to comment upon and grade them.

Lorena

The practice I got writing essays was valuable. I write briefs constantly as a lawyer. I am one of the strongest writers at work. I have had judges compliment me on it. I think it has helped me get some wins for my clients.

Michael

I'm still working on that.

Rosa

The Nursing program was nurturing, and gave me confidence. I was hired right away after I graduated. Nursing has been a great profession.

If you had the chance, would you choose the same program or position again?

Elvia

Absolutely!

Lorena

Yes. I wish I'd spent more time here.

Michael

Yes. I should have come here sooner. I wouldn't change a thing.

Rosa

Yes.

What do you know now that you wish you had known during your time at CCC?

Elvia

I was so goal oriented when a student. I wish I had taken more time with my studies, and maybe gotten more work experience before going directly to graduate school from undergrad. There is so much value in other experiences that contribute to your growth personally and professionally.

Michael

Be more persistent in taking advantage of various opportunities and connections, especially internships.

Rosa

I wish I'd taken more time and made more friends. When you are young, you are in such a rush!

What advice would you give someone thinking of attending/working at CCC?

Elvia

Take classes here, learn about the resources available to you, the classes and teachers who are genuinely interested in helping them attain their educational goals. Workwise: I love CCC. I can't see myself working anywhere else. It is my dream job. It has allowed me to teach and make a difference in student lives.

Lorena

It is good to go to a smaller school initially. It helps the transition from high school to college. CCC has lots of help for its students – reach out and ask for it.

Michael

For some people, it is better to start at a community college, especially if you are not sure what you want to do. There are lots of people here who will mentor/help you be all you can be. It can be a more personalized education. CCC is like my family college.

Rosa

Go sit with a counselor and get an education plan. Enjoy the CCC family!

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Be more persistent in taking advantage of various opportunities and connections

CCC Foundation Hall of Fame

Inaugural Inductees for service to the college 2004

J. D Banks

Bert Coffey

Richard Granzella Family

Mabel Hom

Mechanics Bank

Dr. Leroy Mims

Karleen Shields-Thompson

Dorothy Wendt

Sy Zell