**South Texas College**

Sept 2020 News Center – “Best Value” article

Santos reviewed

***‘Ex’-Factors:* Cost Just One Reason Students Choose to *Experience Exceptional***

For working adult Mike Santos, choosing South Texas College to launch a new career meant *dollars*. For high school grad Aniken Castañeda, it just made *sense*.

As the health crisis imposes on students to recalibrate their higher education plans, South Texas College is picking up the slack with a renewed commitment to high-quality hybrid learning. And with tuition rates clocking in at *less than half* the cost of a typical university, STC is being perceived, more than ever, as the smarter, savvier option.

“I looked at it like I was budgeting my next two years,” says Santos, now succeeding as a CAD technician for Milnet Architectural Services in McAllen. “STC was the best fit — it was convenient, and I’m supporting my local college.”

After two decades in the automotive industry, the RGV native was looking for a way to parlay his knack for engineering into a sustainable living wage. He was researching nearby architectural design programs when he realized that the experience he was looking for had been right under his nose the whole time.

“Compared to other universities I looked into, it was double or triple what I would have paid per semester,” says Santos, who graduated in May with an associate degree in CAD Design. “It’s affordable, and courses are transferable so you can start with the basics.”

The gearhead-turned-Gehry was so impressed with his STC experience that he’s already headed back, this time for an associate degree in Civil Engineering.

“It’s a lot less than what I budgeted,” he explains. “It would cost me $4,000 to $5,000 each semester [somewhere else] … and I’m getting the same education at STC.”

A recent high school graduate and aspiring psychology major, Castañeda would come to a similar realization. Though initially planning to attend Sam Houston State, the health crisis afforded him a moment to think through his higher education plans.

“I made the decision to stay home to give me time to focus on myself,” says Castañeda. “I always knew STC was an option, and I realized it would save me a whole lot of money.”

Beyond the cost savings, though, he saw South Texas College as a way to ease into his next phase in life.

“People get caught up with work and school,” says the Mercedes High School graduate, who was already connected to STC through Dual Enrollment classes. “I’ve had a chance to sit and think, and not be so stressed out. STC has given me that chance.”

Call it a smart alternative. Call it a great value. Just don’t call it a “two-year college.” A pioneer in online and workforce education, South Texas College has kept pace with regional universities when it comes to student opportunity — and has even begun offering bachelor’s degrees.

Meanwhile, the close-knit campus community and dedicated support staff have stayed true to a “small-school” philosophy, prioritizing connectivity and persistence with a custom suite of student-centric services.

“South Texas College is a student-centered college,” says Dr. Jesus Campos, Dean of Library & Support Services. “Whether a student is taking all online classes, hybrid classes, or face-to-face classes, the College offers a strong network of learning support services to help every student succeed.”

That network includes access to professional support staff, from librarians to tutors and counselors, available from the day a new student enrolls until graduation. Through its Centers for Learning Excellence, the College connects students to a wide variety of critical services, both in person and online.

“Faculty and staff take a personal interest in the success of our students,” says Dr. Campos.

The advantages of choosing a South Texas College education don’t stop at superior support. With cutting-edge facilities and a five-star faculty, the College’s commitment to competing with regional universities extends into every classroom, lab and Blackboard session.

And when class is over, students have virtually unlimited access to perks like library services, computer workstations, internet access and quiet study spaces.

“STC having all the software, with certified teachers teaching it, it all came very handy,” says Santos, who began to truly realize the power of his STC education when more experienced coworkers started coming to him for advice. “The skills we learned at STC, it helps them update the skills people have in the industry.

“I recently helped a coworker with 15 years’ experience. He’s [saying] ‘Can you show me?’”

Santos’ and Castañeda’s stories are chapters in an ever-growing codex of South Texas College-borne success. From the [local craft beer industry](https://news.southtexascollege.edu/the-science-of-suds-brewery-apprenticeship-program-will-tackle-regional-demand/), all the way to [the Ivy League](https://news.southtexascollege.edu/borderless-and-boundless-stc-grad-victoria-quintanilla-is-going-places/), STC grads are setting an example for their communities, and shattering preconceived notions of what a “community college” is.

“There has always been a strong sense of mission [at STC],” says Dr. Campos. “We know and care about our community and our students and serve as a catalyst to their success.”

That commitment has engendered a close relationship with the South Texas community, and has provided a platform not only for low-cost college degrees, but for sustainable, generational success.

For Santos, it’s become a family affair. His elementary-school-aged son – unsurprisingly an engineering whiz-kid – plans to follow in his father’s footsteps.

“He helps me with the models … throws ideas at me,” says the proud patriarch. “He’s actually looking into [STC] for engineering.”

And while no parent wants to put a price on their child’s higher education, there’s no doubt that South Texas College’s lower cost makes things easier on families. Students have the opportunity to begin taking college classes while in high school.

“For parents of STC dual credit students, having their sons and daughters start college while still in high school enables these students to get ahead while saving on the cost of traditional enrollment after high school,” says Dr. Campos.

It all makes perfect sense to Santos, who admits he approaches almost everything in life with an engineer’s mindset.

“I seem to look at things like ‘how can I make this better,’” says the savvy super-dad. “That’s a skill set I learned at STC.”