
Accelerate program opens doors for nontraditional students

April 1, 2014



Evan Fishbein worked as a substitute teacher, carpenter, and musician in Taos when he decided to go back to school at age 31 to pursue interests in alternative energy and greenhouses. He began to take classes on the University of New Mexico's Los Alamos campus in January 2013 and a few short months later was a paid intern at the New Mexico Consortium's Biological Research Laboratory and Greenhouse in Los Alamos.

Evan's next step will be to graduate from UNM-Los Alamos this December with an Associate of Applied Science Degree in Applied Technology and follow a dream of owning his own business designing and engineering greenhouses in Santa Fe.

Fishbein credits his participation in UNM-Los Alamos's [Accelerate Technical Training and Job Placement Program](#), which provides academic advising and professional readiness development to nontraditional students, with much of his success.

"The Accelerate program allows college students to get paid for their internships,"

Fishbein noted, “and this adds not only dollars but a sense of purpose. If not for the Accelerate program, I probably would have been working in construction.”

More opportunities

Sheri Lopez is another UNM-Los Alamos student whose Accelerate participation has opened doors. A single mom from Pojoaque who manages a coffee shop full-time in Santa Fe in addition to going to school, Lopez just received word that she has been awarded a paid summer internship in particle physics at the prestigious Fermilab in Chicago, IL. “I would not have known about this opportunity if it had not been for the Accelerate program,” Lopez said. “Accelerate opens doors for you, but it’s up to you to make the effort and walk through them.”

Like Evan Fishbein, Sheri Lopez also plans to graduate from UNM-Los Alamos, but in her case with an Associate of Science Degree in Pre-Engineering and different long-term goals. Lopez plans to combine her love of physics and interest in mechanical engineering in a double-major bachelor’s degree from UNM’s main campus in Albuquerque. Her young son, Dominic, who is turning two this month, will be along for the ride. “You don’t have to be 18 and fresh out of high school to accomplish your goals,” Lopez suggested. “Maybe you are just a late bloomer or lifelong learner. Whenever you start, simply put one foot in front of the other and don’t give up hope.”

Applying to the program

The Accelerate Technical Training Program is available not only through UNM-Los Alamos but also UNM-Taos, Northern New Mexico College in Española, the Santa Fe Community College, and New Mexico Highlands University and Luna Community College in Las Vegas. The program is managed by the Regional Development Corporation (RDC) and is funded by the Department of Energy, Office of Environmental Management, and by contributions from the six participating colleges, Los Alamos National Laboratory, the RDC, and regional employers.

Of the three paid fellowships offered by each college annually, 12 are covered by the Department of Energy and six by the Regional Economic Development Initiative (REDI).

For further information, go to the [Accelerate New Mexico](#) website or contact the RDC’s [Carla Rachkowski](#). To apply to the Accelerate program, you must be an enrolled student at one of the participating colleges and complete the Accelerate application by October 1, 2014.

Current Accelerate students are invited to participate in the [Accelerate Summer Math Experience](#) in June and July. The program pays tuition and a stipend to those who successfully complete the math camp.

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