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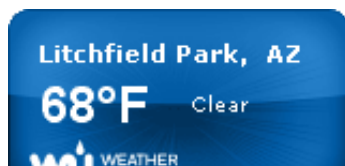
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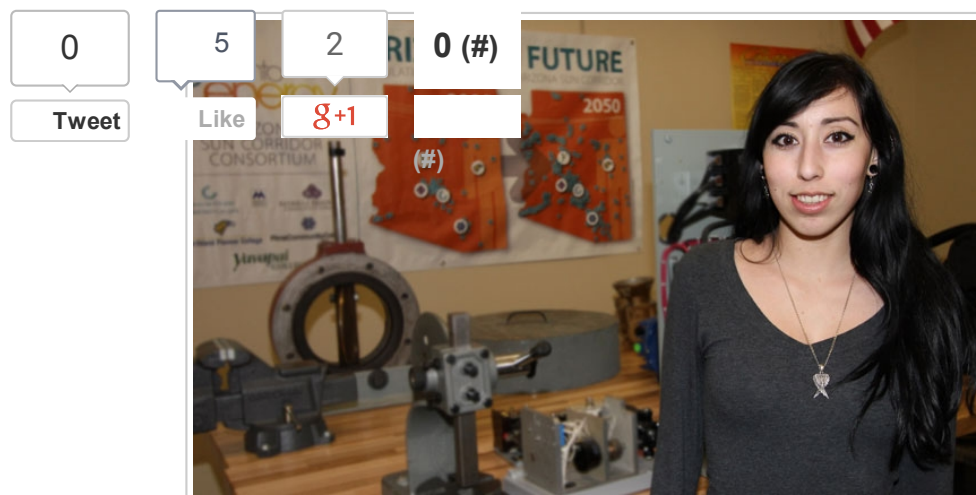
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EMCC grad gets 1st nuclear certification in Ariz.

Submitted by Jeannette Cruz on Tue, 03/24/2015 - 12:00am



FADWA SANDOVAL stands in front of valve equipment last December in the Estrella Mountain Community College Power Plant Technology lab. Sandoval is the first student in Arizona to receive a nuclear certification.

Fadwa Sandoval, a graduate of Estrella Mountain Community College in Avondale, has become the first Arizona student to receive an accredited and nationally recognized nuclear certification from the Nuclear Uniform Curriculum Program.

Launched in the summer of 2012, the program is offered to degree-seeking students pursuing careers in the nuclear energy industry.

The certification is a component of the college's Power Plant Technology's degree pathway, and is recognized by all U.S. nuclear power plants including the Palo Verde Nuclear Generating Station in the far West Valley.

On Feb. 12, Sandoval was formally recognized as the first person in the state to complete the program. The dedication also recognized Sandoval's achievements as an intern at Palo Verde in 2013, through Bartlett Nuclear, a contract company that supplies labor support during the refueling outage at Palo Verde, and a national Radiation Protection Forum she attended in San Antonio in July of 2013.

Founded by the Nuclear Energy Institute, the NUCP aligns the hiring needs of industry partners with the curriculum offered at local colleges in an attempt to minimize on-the-job training required for a student after college graduation.

NUCP students learn skills specific to the nuclear energy industry.

EMCC and Arizona Public Service Co. have partnered to offer the NUCP training in five key areas: mechanical maintenance, electrical maintenance, instrumentation and control, radiation protection technology and non-licensed operations.

“The NUCP allows you to be able to go to any nuclear facility and say, ‘I got the training that you get here,’” Sandoval said. “Reactor theory, plant systems — those are all classes you could take there if they hired you, these courses are being supplemented to you so that when you get out there, they know you got the training, you passed the training, and you met their standards.”

A key requirement of the program is for students to achieve a grade of at least 80 percent in each core class of the PPT degree path. Sandoval said she often tries to convince herself that the program wasn’t that difficult, but looking back, she finds that it was actually very demanding and time consuming.

“For students entering the program, the program’s courses only become harder as they move further along,” she said. “You need to know that your most valuable asset is you. Don’t overbook yourself.”

She advised that for those who want to be in the NUCP, prioritizing and managing personal and class time properly is crucial. Sandoval said she spent at least 60 hours’ worth of work in the NUCP, and found that she had to drop a course to be able to pull through.

Sandoval kept her focus strong and managed to pass the rigorous training and graduated from the PPT program last fall.

“It’s an awesome experience because I did work really hard,” she said. “I really tried to put any time that I could to help with the program because I really believed in it so much since it started. I don’t think I would have gotten the same treatment and help if I would have gone to any other program.”

Sandoval, the eldest sibling of five, is also the first college graduate in her family.

“I know it’s a big deal for my parents because neither of them went beyond high school. They always told me, ‘You’ve got the brain. You’ve got the head. We will be there for you to make you get somewhere or do something with that brain,’ and it feels good to show them that I was listening even though they thought I wasn’t.”

Beyond the classroom, Sandoval is also a model for her younger siblings.

“I spend a lot of time helping them with homework,” she said. “It’s like I’m their own personal tutor. It saves my parents money.”

Sandoval has also volunteered to be a program ambassador at many outreach activities and events and recently sold her first painting to a tattoo artist in Connecticut through her Facebook page.

When she’s not busy volunteering her time, Sandoval said she enjoys reading science fiction and horror, playing the piano and painting water color and acrylic portraits.

“I’m basically a big nerd,” she said. “Now that I am done with school, it gives me a little more time to paint on the side while I look for a job.”

But, Sandoval said she will continue to apply in the hopes of obtaining her dream job with APS.

“I’m sure they’ll recognize my hard work,” she said. “They’re the kind of company that rewards hard work and rewards achievements. I can see that happening if I just keep showing them that I want it — persistence prevails.”

“I feel confident that Fadwa will be able to find a career,” said Kayla Wolfe, public relations assistant for the energy programs at EMCC. “I feel confident that she will represent us well because she has already shown that time and again.”

EMCC is currently the only college in Arizona accredited to offer the NUCP to students. The total enrollment in the PPT program is currently 323 students.

“If the students have half of the passion and excitement Fadwa has, I have no doubt they will do well,” Wolfe said.

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