

# PRESS RELEASE

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## STILL SHARING WHAT THEY DID LAST SUMMER



West Los Angeles College STEM students Jessica Neal and Armin Monfared will be featured in the college's Spring class schedule available in mid-October

Just as the summer weather is not yet gone, neither are the student stories about what they did last summer. For a couple of West Los Angeles College STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Math) students, summer vacation was spent in paid internships at a UCLA research lab and the prestigious Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL). Both students were part of the WLAC STEM Scholars program which provides scholarship support and additional curriculum for qualified students interested in pursuing careers in science.

### ARMIN MONFARED: FROM ESL TO JPL

While Armin Monfared was born in the United States, he spent his childhood in Iran. At age 14, he left his family and friends to return to America. Speaking no English, he moved in with an older aunt and enrolled at **Santa Monica High School** in the ESL track. "It took about 2 years," to learn English, explained Armin and watching cartoons played a big role. Despite the language obstacle, he still managed to graduate on time.

A class at West reignited one of his childhood interests. "As a kid, everyone in my family knew I had a passion for building – okay maybe breaking things. I wanted to see how things worked." This, explained Monfared, is why he had a large collection of broken toys and why today he aspires to be a mechanical or aerospace engineer.

Monfared is confident that West has sufficiently prepared him for UC Berkeley where he hopes to transfer next year. "The atmosphere in class is less stressful and communication with teachers is better" than at a larger community college he attended before enrolling at West, he said. And, he smiled, "the parking at West great."

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## **STILL SHARING WHAT THEY DID LAST SUMMER...continued**

Armin became aware of the JPL opportunity through West's STEM Scholar program of which he is a member. His culminating project in the STEM program was presenting his research on how travel to other solar systems could be possible through "Hyper-Loop." The presentation was made at the Honors Transfer Council of California held at UC Irvine.

### **JESSICA NEAL: HARNESSING POWER**

Despite her youthful looks, Jessica Neal has been out of high school for over 10 years. In fact, she already has a Bachelor's Degree in Audio Production. But now, she is making the transition from sound engineering to material science engineering where she hopes to one day "apply physics to chemistry and biology to harness energy storage and delivery processes inside the body, for external applications," she said. In other words, if we can better understand the way the human body, which so effectively stores and uses energy, then we can apply that to how we power complex and everyday technologies.

Neal also connected to her internship through the WLAC STEM Scholars program. She spent her summer working in a hands-on, paid internship at a UCLA Material Science research lab. Her team worked on a project commissioned by a commercial technology company to create higher power and energy storage in rechargeable batteries. Part of her work was to create and refine a material called Aerogel. A single small batch took two weeks or more to create in the lab. "There's a lot of waiting in material science," she laughed. But you fill it with research.

Prior to enrolling at West, Neal worked in music. "It was intimidating to come back to college when I started – like writing with your left hand for a right-handed person." But, she said, "West is amazing! It feels more like family. The amount of effort faculty give is unparalleled."

Neal's goal is to transfer to UCLA in Fall 2015 to complete her second Bachelor's Degree and a Master's Degree. After a career in Material Science, she would like to teach and perhaps have the same important impact on others as her high school physics teacher had on her. But later in her life, she definitely would like to work in theoretical science. "Everything we understand started with a theory." For Neal, her life dream would be adding to the body of important scientific thought.

More information about West Los Angeles College, an accredited California Community College, can be found at [www.WLAC.edu](http://www.WLAC.edu). For information on the STEM Scholars program visit [www.WLAC.edu/Science](http://www.WLAC.edu/Science).

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