



## CEI's first class seeks degrees

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Jaxon Walker, right, and Isabel Olivares work on a math assignment at College of Eastern Idaho, Thursday, September 28, 2017.



Marie Perry, left, helps her student, Lana Twitchell, right, with a math assignment at College of Eastern Idaho, Thursday, September 28, 2017.



Kayla Flowers poses for a portrait at College of Eastern Idaho, Thursday, September 28, 2017. Flowers is taking general education classes to transfer for her degree in animal sciences.

**By BRYAN CLARK**  
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The signs in front of the school on the corner of 17th Street and Hitt Road still say “Eastern Idaho Technical College,” but inside the buildings, many students at the College of Eastern Idaho are already on a path that will lead toward a four-year degree.

The College of Eastern Idaho was the subject of a hotly contested ballot question in May, one in which proponents prevailed by an overwhelming margin, winning the support of 71 percent of county voters, easily clearing the 67 percent bar required to establish a new taxing district.

Following the victory, the school scrambled to get new transfer degree programs up and running, and it succeeded in a “soft launch” of CEI only three months later. Officials plan the main roll-out of the program during the spring semester.

“There’s certainly a lot of interest,” spokesman Todd Wightman said, “so I think we’re going to start growing quickly.”

More than 100 students already have either signed up for the associate of arts degree program or are taking a slate of general education classes with an eye to eventually transferring their credits to a four-year university, according to Lori Barber, coordinator of the associate degree program.

“We’re getting more and more calls every day,” she said.

Wightman said the school is aiming to get a total of 4,000 students as quickly as possible.

## **Pushing for excellence**

The first class at the College of Eastern Idaho is drawn from a diverse background, from recent high school graduates, to those with college credits but no degree, to older residents for whom learning is a way to enrich their lives.

“This is going to become a destination for the whole community,” Barber said.

Marie Perry was a mathematics instructor at EITC for five years, and she’s continuing to teach at CEI. She primarily teaches remedial math, meant to get student’s ability up to the level required to take college courses.

She teaches basic algebra to a variety of students, including those seeking GEDs, those who are working on technical certifications, and now students who are seeking transfer degrees.

With the transition, she said, she’s begun pushing her GED students to go on and seek a degree.

“We’re encouraging all of them to consider two-year associate degrees,” Perry said. “They’re expecting enrollment to boom, so I may be teaching two classes in spring.”

“It’s really satisfying to see students be successful,” she added.

## **Finishing up**

Kayla Flowers, 24, is a recent transplant to Idaho Falls. Originally from northern California, Flowers has spent her early years travelling around the country, recently completing a trip along the southern

portion of the Appalachian Trail. She has family in the area, and she decided to make eastern Idaho her next destination.

Flowers has completed college courses elsewhere, including many courses in the arts and humanities. She has worked in a variety of positions, including retail jobs, working as a production assistant on national television shows and working at a winery.

But she found her passion working at a veterinary clinic, working hands-on with animals.

“I’m a compassionate person, so any work I want to do long-term is going to be taking care of somebody,” Flowers said. “I feel like I really understand animals.”

Flowers could be among the first students to earn an associate of arts degree from CEI. The majority of her prior coursework transferred into the new community college, so she’ll only need two semesters of work to graduate.

“I feel really comfortable with this school,” she said.

## **Setting an example**

Others students are returning to their studies later in life. Maria Bates attended EITC in the early 1980s, taking secretarial courses. She found a job before she finished her certificate, and after a series of jobs she found herself back at EITC, working as the assistant to the coordinator of the school’s certified nursing assistant program.

Bates is nearing retirement, and she’s long been fascinated with the human mind. Bates initially considered attending Idaho State University to get a degree in psychology. She’s eligible for discounted rates available to older residents, but after voters approved the community college, she opted to take her first slate of classes at CEI.

“I thought, ‘I’ll just go to my own school,’” she said.

Bates said she doubts she’ll ever work as a psychologist, but learning provides a way to enrich her life.

“Like everyone who’s studying psychology, I want to know why I’m crazy,” she said with a laugh.

Bates still works full time, so she’s only taking a few evening courses at present. But she said it’s been a perfect fit, with a workload that’s manageable. She plans to get her associate degree in three years, and then finish her studies at ISU.

“I want to say I did it,” she said. “I want to set this example (for my children and grandchildren).”

## **Technical education continues**

The technical programs that EITC offered for years are continuing unchanged.

At present, the bulk of CEI’s enrollment is made up of students seeking technical certificates or degrees. There are no plans for big changes in those programs.

Benito Haro, 18, graduated from Sugar-Salem High School this year. Haro said he’s long had an interest in cars, and he’s enrolled in CEI’s certified technician program with the goal of earning an associate of applied science.

“It’s a really good program, and the tuition is low,” Haro said.

Haro works about 25 hours per week as a landscaper while taking a full slate of classes, including courses in mathematics, electrical circuits, safety protocols and auto-mechanic courses. He plans to push hard and graduate in 2019.

“If you really want to do this, you have to be dedicated,” he said.

Barber encouraged more students, from recent graduates to seniors, to inquire about how CEI can serve them.

“The doors are very, very open for the community if they want to ask questions, or if they want to take classes,” she said.

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