Reinvent your dreams: Puja Kapoor earns national opportunities with NASA

Student Puja Kapoor may seem like a stranger in a strange land: an English major, bachelor’s degree in hand, studying space science and pre-med at CCA. What gives?

As proponents of higher education readily acknowledge, community colleges are a fantastic place to start, or to start over, and the decision made by Aurora resident Kapoor in the spring of 2009 illustrates why. Looking for a new challenge after a stint as a caseworker at a Denver nonprofit, Kapoor decided to revisit her dream of studying science. A young woman who, as a child, always wanted to be a doctor—she recalls the toy doctor kit she once toted around—Kapoor now wants to make her mark in the medical field. And what better way to put her toe in the water, she figured, than to take a biology course at CCA. “I had a great time, and I really liked it,” she says. “I knew right away that this was the right path for me.”

Jump forward a couple of semesters to the present: Kapoor has been selected as a National Community College Aerospace Scholar and will participate in a May 20-22 workshop with NASA engineers at the Johnson Space Center in Houston. She is one of only 60 community and junior college students from across the nation invited to participate. And there’s more: she has secured a coveted internship with NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, Calif., where she will spend the summer working with a team of research engineers.

Clearly, Kapoor has been making the most of her time at CCA. Shortly after enrolling, she learned of a science project at the college sponsored by the Colorado Space...

Moving stories heard at Scholarship Luncheon

The fifth annual Scholarship Recognition Luncheon, hosted by the CCA Foundation, was held April 29 at the Marriott DTC. The event honored the 2009-2010 Foundation scholarship recipients and acknowledged the donors who made the scholarships possible.

An early surprise was the announcement by Brad Pierce, president of the CCA Foundation board and an Aurora city council member, who said he will enhance his support by naming CCAF the beneficiary of an individual retirement account he inherited from his mother. The funds will be used to support scholarships at CCA. “My hope is that this donation will change the lives of the individuals who will receive these awards,” he said.

Other highlights of the luncheon: films featuring scholarship recipients Danielle Jenson and Rashad Morris were shown, and corporate sponsors ADT Security Services, Brakes Plus, 2G Associates, FirstBank, Medical Center of Aurora, Pinnacol Assurance, Suss Buick Pontiac GMC, Baker Hostetler, Citywide Banks, and Colorado Capital Banks were acknowledged. Kimberly Banks and Avery Dopher were recognized as recipients of Student Success Award Scholarships, and Derek Sagerman, Cameron Roath,

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Learning and bonding over brontosaurus

When a discussion on endangered species evolved into a dialogue on dinosaurs in one of Maria Halloran’s ESL reading classes, Halloran mentioned that actual dinosaur prints could be seen just outside of Denver—and the students were hooked. “They asked if we could go see them, and, because I try to infuse local connections in my classes, it seemed like a great idea,” she said. Halloran also told them about Red Rocks, and reports that while the students were very interested, they were somewhat intimidated to go on their own.

So a field trip was approved, and preparations got under way. Halloran assigned additional readings so the students could learn new scientific vocabulary to help them understand what they were going to see. She also divided the class so that smaller groups each were responsible for being “experts” in one of the areas they were to visit.

On the morning of April 21, the group, chaperoned by Halloran and ESL instructor Ruby Eichenour, set out for Red Rocks Park and Dinosaur Ridge.

After the experience, Halloran asked the students for feedback. “This excursion is one of the best things that has ever happened to me,” said Frank Fosu (Ghana). His classmate, Joseph Kitpta (Congo), reported that “everything I saw in our trip was a benefit for my knowledge, especially as a student and I believe that I learned something even for all my future classes.”

Columbia native Jessica Castro also benefited from the trip. “I learned a lot of vocabulary related to those places,” she said. “I had the opportunity to see and touch real bones and prints of dinosaurs.”

Pavel Borisov of Belarus wants to spread the word about what he saw. “The view at the Red Rocks amphitheater is mesmerizing and breathtaking. It’s amazing to learn what nature can create,” he enthused. “I definitely will bring my family there to enjoy the heart-stopping scenery. The visit to Dinosaur Ridge reminded me how young our species truly is but, at the same time, how sophisticated we are.”

Other students also were amazed at the sights. “How is it possible that in our state we can have this significant part of our history that has millions of years?” questioned Eliva Solano (Mexico). “I never imagined seeing these fascinating things. When I was there, I never thought that this place could transport me to that era. It is incredible how the formation of the rocks can tell many things. I found Red Rocks Park spectacular.”

Belete Hailegiorgis of Ethiopia said that the outing has encouraged him to learn even more. “The footprints left on the rocks that I have seen inspired me to think and read more books about dinosaurs,” he said. “It was wonderful having such an important trip in a group sharing experience together. Echoing the sentiment, Mayra Vargas of Mexico concurred: “The best part was that our class got to know each other better.”

For Halloran, the outing was especially memorable: “I’ll never forget the wonder in their eyes as they encountered and related to these places,” she says. “I really can’t express what I felt and still feel about this opportunity the department and college afforded us.”

First announced in December, Chris Hunt has now been formally recognized as the college’s 2009 Classified Employee of the Year. He and other Colorado Community College employees were honored at a luncheon held in April. In their nominations for the honor, Hunt’s colleagues said: “Although much of Christopher Hunt’s work is behind the scenes, CCA would be lost without him.” Another: “A familiar face at the college since 1999, Chris can be seen making the rounds while delivering the mail and setting up rooms for meetings. Known for his strong work ethic, Chris is always willing to go the extra mile and is consistently on top of things in the off chance that something is forgotten. He makes sure every detail is covered, and, as his colleagues say, ‘Chris makes the rest of us look good!’”
Congratulations, graduates!

A celebratory and, at times, boisterous crowd of family and friends cheered on the Fall 2009 and Spring 2010 CCA graduates at a ceremony held May 8 at the Arapahoe County Fairgrounds.

Grads heard from numerous speakers during the proceedings, including President Linda Bowman, Vice President Matt Gianneschi, film school instructor Sandra Gabrych, and student Katherine Cullis. Dr. Nate Easley, deputy director for the Denver Scholarship Foundation and president of the Denver Public Schools Board of Education, offered the commencement address.

Puja Kapoor

Grant Consortium. The “BalloonSat” project intrigued her because student-designed experiments would be launched via high-altitude balloon and thoroughly researched upon recovery.

Kapoor signed on, and last fall, two student teams built their experiments. Kapoor’s group explored the ability of genetic material to withstand the extreme conditions of space and near-space conditions, a subject of great interest to NASA. An insulated box was created, offering varying exposures of E. coli bacteria to heat, cold, and the radiation of the sun. Payloads were launched in January high above the Colorado plains and reached an altitude of 77,847—literally, to the edge of space—before the balloon burst, returning its precious cargo to earth. Following a 33-mile “track and chase” of the balloon during its ascent and descent, the students recovered their experiments from a rancher’s field and rushed them back to the college, where they conducted detailed analysis. Within a matter of weeks, they were on their way to the Jet Propulsion Laboratory to present their findings. It was during this trip that Kapoor learned of the possibility of an internship at JPL.

After her busy summer, Kapoor will return to CCA to complete her prerequisites for medical school. She has been supported in her studies by a Helen K. and Arthur E. Johnson Scholarship, which covers tuition, books and fees. “Getting this scholarship changed everything for me,” she says. “Attending CCA was meant to be. I love it here—it really is a community! The class sizes are exactly what I was looking for, and it is a truly wonderful environment.”

Faculty member Victor Andersen, who has worked closely with Kapoor in his role as CCA advisor to the Space Grant project, says he knows that she will make the most of her time at JPL and Johnson. “She is considering a future as a physician in space medicine, so these are rare and fortunate opportunities she has ahead of her,” he adds.

Kapoor agrees. “CCA has offered me these once-in-a-lifetime opportunities,” she says. “My advice to other students is, don’t be afraid of anything, because your fear holds you back. For the first time in my life, I’ve pulled myself out of my own box and have found a happiness I didn’t have before, because I am pursuing my dream. There are lots of people who have supported me, especially my mom, when I was ready to give up and walk away—but I really do believe that you need to listen to yourself, pick yourself up after your failures, and keep reinventing your dreams. Like they say, where there’s a will, there’s a way—there’s no reason to give up.”
Outstanding APS biz, tech students recognized

Aspiring business and technology students from Aurora Public Schools were recognized at a scholarship reception held at CCA on April 29, and four outstanding young people were presented with scholarships toward the college of their choice.

The APS Business Advisory Board annually selects deserving students and honors them publicly at the event. The Committee comprises a cross-section of business organizations, companies, and individuals throughout Aurora who are dedicated to developing and nurturing APS’ business programs and students.

Scholarships are awarded to students based on their academic achievements, along with teacher recommendations. This year’s recipients each received a scholarship in the amount of $500.

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“The Aurora Public School system produces quality students through a quality business educational program for those students,” said Karla Adamson-Lesko of CCA’s accounting, business, and computers department and a member of the advisory board. “Their efforts make these scholarships particularly meaningful.”

This year’s recipients are: Hector Cardenas of Aurora Central High School, who will attend CCA; Katherine Aker, Rangeview High School, who will attend Western Washington University; Hannah Tikal, Hinkley High School, who will attend the University of Northern Colorado; and Susana de la Torre, Gateway High School, who also will attend UNC.

On hand for the presentations to the students were APS teachers Randy Mills and Kim Reiser of Rangeview High School, Genevieve Bennett and Christi Smyth of Hinkley High School, Raymond Downing of Gateway High School, and Michael Quinn of Aurora Central High School.

Scholarship Luncheon

Daniel Hunt, and Warren Moorehead, beneficiaries of the Daniels Opportunity Scholarship program, were applauded. Additionally, Christenza Lager was honored as the Chairs Choice Scholarship Recipient for 2009.

Longtime supporter Jim Lewien gave an impassioned talk on the values of a good education and a strong work ethic. He told those gathered: “You are creating your own legacy when you earn a degree or a certificate, and you are doing the same when you provide support allowing someone to pursue an education.” Robin McGuire, New Beginning Scholarship recipient, offered inspiring remarks about the opportunities the college has given her following a series of life-changing events. “I can, and will, redefine myself through education,” she promised. And when she succeeds, she said, she will fulfill her desire to give back “and help others achieve their goals and dreams.”

Diane Garcia, CCAF board member, challenged attendees to contribute and promised to match all contributions dollar for dollar up to a total of $10,000. Lastly, a video tribute to a CCAF donor, the late Gerald A. “Jerry” Kraus, was shown and presented to his wife, Mary Ellen.
Hundreds “Take Back the Night”

Hundreds attended the second annual Take Back the Night event at CCA on April 15 as students, faculty, staff, and community members alike gathered to advocate for the right of individuals to feel safe from violence. Take Back the Night is recognized as a national movement and is a popular event on college campuses around the world.

Included in the day’s offerings: a presentation by a detective from the Aurora Police Department, a rape awareness program, self-defense workshops, a presentation on “Gender, Equality, and Inequality in Cross-Cultural Perspectives” by Dr. Sara Jamieson, and a keynote address by Erin Jemison, interim executive director of the Colorado Coalition Against Sexual Assault. Two “open mic” sessions, one for men, one for women, allowed personal stories to be shared. An evening rally drew participants to an outdoor “stage” featuring readings from the Vagina Monologues, performed by CCA theater students.

Retiree luncheon offers time to catch up

A special Retiree Celebration was held April 19 to recognize the people who helped make CCA what it is today. Faculty and staff joined numerous retirees to hear updates from President Bowman and enjoy lunch. Among the many updates shared: The “wild ride” on campus due to the increase in enrollment; developments in technology (Banner, MyCCA portal, new ccaurora.edu); pending projects on the Lowry Campus to improve entrances, pathways, and landscaping; developments in concurrent enrollment in partnership with Aurora Public Schools; and the initiation of a nursing program in collaboration with the University of Colorado College of Nursing.

International Fest a colorful display

With an emphasis on Eastern Europe, the college’s annual International Festival drew more than 400 participants throughout the day on April 20. Lessons in international dance, an International Student Association fashion show, an ESL talent show, and music by the Denver/Boulder-based group Planina were just a few of the offerings that attracted students and community members to the colorful event.
Fair educates, connects students

With an eye toward educating students about the possibilities of careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics ("STEM"), the college held a STEM Career Fair on April 21. The fair featured local STEM employers, as well as representatives from the college’s STEM-related programs. High school and college students had opportunities to learn about STEM careers and network with fellow students and others.

College hosts speech competitions

On April 23, 13 student speakers from CCA squared off against each other for the honor of competing in a regional speech contest on May 7. Each student gave an impassioned presentation, and topics included war, human trafficking, world hunger, abstinence, military service, biking for health and the environment, and “blood” or “conflict” diamonds. Judges gave first place to Liz Anderson, with Crystal Smith taking second place and David Fuller placing third. Anderson was the sole competitor representing CCA at the Metro Regional Community College speech competition, also held on campus. Heather McFadden of Community College of Denver took the honors in that event.

Celebrating a “remarkable experience”

Faculty and staff gathered May 4 to celebrate efforts invested in the recent Higher Learning Commission visit. President Bowman thanked those responsible for a successful preliminary report from the HLC on the college’s concurrent enrollment initiative, calling the positive analysis and review and the entire process an “incredible team effort” and a “remarkable experience.” “Your hard work and commitment and openness and daring” have allowed CCA and APS to offer these opportunities for students, she said. Bowman also thanked Aurora Public Schools, a partner with CCA in ensuring that concurrent enrollment and ASCENT programs reach students who can benefit from college while still in high school.

CCA draws high school students to enrollment sessions

From April 27 through May 5, CCA held five ASCENT application and advising sessions for concurrent enrollment. Approximately 100 APS students and parents visited with CCA and APS College Pathway counselors to get information and complete enrollment applications.

On April 30, approximately 70 high school juniors and seniors from Rangeview, GEAR UP at Aurora Central, and the Future School at Pickens Technical College attended College Preview Day where they were introduced to college classes by attending a Try-it-Now, Take-it-Later sample class. The students also learned about financial options, filled out enrollment applications, and toured the Lowry campus.
**Higher Learning Commission reps review concurrent enrollment**

On April 26 and 27, a two-member team representing the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) visited CCA and Aurora Central High School for a focus visit on CCA’s concurrent enrollment initiative. The team shared a positive preliminary report of their findings. Based on many factors including interviews with faculty, staff, and students, and a review of resource materials, the team recommended approval of the concurrent enrollment initiative and of off-site instruction at the high schools. They praised CCA as a “best practice model.”

**DURA grant supports renewable energy program**

The Denver Urban Renewal Authority has approved a proposal for $135,000 to support simulation training in the college’s renewable energy program. The funding will support programs at CCA and Community College of Denver and will be used to install two simulated homes on the Lowry Campus. The homes will serve as environments in which full-scale, residential solar electrical systems can be installed, and then disassembled and reinstalled. They will serve as simulations for energy audits and energy-efficient improvements such as insulation and caulking.

**Vice-principal of Beijing Foreign Language School tours CCA**

Mr. Yun Chen, vice-principal of the Beijing Foreign Language School, toured CCA with Christina Burton, principal of the Global Village Academy, and Ana Martin-Mejia, CCA World Language faculty. GVA is the charter school within the Aurora Public School district that has partnered with CCA on a U.S. Department of Education grant for Chinese language instruction. The Beijing Foreign Language School is GVA’s sister school in China. Chen has been in the field of education for more than 40 years, mostly as a professor of sociology and Chinese. For the past eight years, he has been the vice-principal of the Beijing Foreign Language School, which is affiliated with the Beijing Foreign Studies University.

**Students recognized as Rising Stars**

CCA students Barbara “Bobbie” Boykin and Sarah Simmons were recognized as CCA’s “Rising Stars” for 2009-2010. Each year, the State Student Advisory Council (SSAC) offers awards to community college students who exhibit a high level of leadership and involvement in student activities. Boykin and Simmons were recognized at the SSAC Spring Luncheon on April 14.

**Kudos to . . .**

Members of the “BalloonSat” science team, who continue to impress with their outstanding work. As a follow-up to the launch of a science experiment via high-altitude balloon in January, CCA students on April 17 presented a paper titled “The Effects of Near Space Conditions on the Genome E. coli” at the Colorado Undergraduate Space Research Symposium in Boulder, ultimately earning the grand prize and beating out teams from CU Boulder, the Colorado School of Mines, and other four-year institutions. CCA was the only community college invited to present a paper.

**CCA “Green” tip of the month**

Two recent directives to benefit the environment have been signed by Gov. Bill Ritter, Jr., in honor of Earth Day 2010. The first asks state agencies to develop and implement plans for paper consumption reduction. Employees are asked to use double-sided document printing when possible and save e-mails in computer folders rather than printing them out. Second, agencies are asked to avoid purchases of bottled water except where a water supply is unavailable, where bottled water is needed to protect safety and health, or for use in emergencies. By each contributing in a small way, we can make a big difference for the planet!

**“Emergency Planning” tip of the month**

The Office of Security shares the following tip: With the weather getting warmer, do NOT leave pets in vehicles. On warm, sunny days, cars can heat up very quickly, and leaving a window open is not enough. A hot car will lose fluid and become dehydrated rapidly, increasing the risk of heatstroke and death. Please be aware of these risk factors as the temperatures rise, and if an animal is left in a vehicle and Security becomes aware of the situation, the vehicle can legally be entered to render aid to the animal.

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**JOB CLUB.** 9 a.m., May 24, A202, CentreTech Campus. The Job Club is held the 2nd and 4th Mondays of each month. Bring employment questions, resume, and job search questions. CCA offers opportunities to dialogue with others who are unemployed, facing unemployment, or just looking to change careers.

**CAREER ORIENTATION.** 1 p.m., June 2, A202, CentreTech Campus. Explore career possibilities.

**FINANCIAL AID WORKSHOP.** 3:30 p.m., June 9, A205, CentreTech Campus. Meet with Financial Aid Advisors to learn more about a variety of scholarships. Workshops take place the 2nd Wednesday of each month.

**A HISTORY OF LOWRY AFB.** 12-1 p.m., May 19, Aurora History Museum, 15051 E. Alameda Pkwy. A presentation by retired Air Force pilot and Wings Over the Rockies Museum docent Harry Blout. $4; $3 for Aurora residents. Call 303-739-6666 for more information.

**SOLAR SAVVY WORKSHOP.** 12-1:30 p.m., May 20, Aurora Municipal Center. Find out everything there is to know about solar energy for homes and businesses. Free. RSVP to Diana Denwood, 303-739-7483.

For more events, see www.auroragov.org.