

## Student Completed Degree While Working as a Construction Inspector

Sydney Martinez is the first person in her family to go to college. As a result of being a College of the Sequoias (COS) construction student, she landed a job as a city building inspector assistant. While working, she completed the COS Associate of Science Construction Technology degree as well as earned a skill certificate in construction inspection. Now, she is a construction supervisor at Champion Home Builders, Inc. and studying to complete her Bachelor of Science degree in Construction Management at California State University, Fresno.

Martinez was introduced to construction careers as a student at Lindsay High School in the Project Lead the Way (PLTW) engineering program. “I knew that I wanted to get into field engineering,” said Martinez. “I do best with hands-on learning and liked to be outside working on projects. I don’t mind getting dirty.”

As a first-generation college student, Martinez had the full support of her family. “My dad is in heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) so he was excited that I wanted to get into construction,” said Martinez. “My mom wanted me to find a career that paid well. Whenever I ran into a challenge, she always helped me solve it, like arranging tutoring. I’m extremely grateful.”

Martinez started at Fresno State but switched to COS during COVID. “I applied to the City of Lindsay and went for an interview for a maintenance position,” said Martinez. “When the city staff found out that I was a COS student, they offered me the Building Inspection Assistant position. I was able to work part-time on Tuesday and Thursday when I had classes and full days the rest of the week.”

The city inspection work perfectly complemented the plumbing, electrical and construction inspection courses that Martinez was taking at COS. “At the city, I got experience reviewing blue prints for plumbing, underground utilities and electrical,” said Martinez. “I had to make sure the plans met the city codes. Because of the construction classes at COS, I knew what to look for when I was out in the field.”



**Sydney Martinez**

Construction Supervisor at Champion Home Builders, Inc.

COS Construction Technology Instructor Brian Unruh explained that the college is focused on training students so they can head into the workforce. “COS offers multiple avenues into the construction management field,” said Unruh. “In two years, students in the construction program gain a broad selection of experiences that prepare them for careers, from cutting rafters, assembling walls and installing roofing to calculating concrete volumes and knowing where to set the anchor bolts.”

At COS, Unruh indicated that students can earn an Associate of Science in Construction Technology, Certificate of Achievement in Construction Technology or Skill Certificates in Carpentry/Millwork, Construction Inspection or Construction Management. “To gain practical experience, the students build projects like a modular house or chicken coop, and work at job sites on community projects such helping Habitat for Humanity to assemble studio size dwellings for veterans,” said Unruh.

Most students go into residential or commercial construction, or join the carpenters union, according to Unruh. “Graduates often start as framers at \$20 per hour, or if they are working on a prevailing wage job, can earn more, and salaries increase dramatically with experience,” said Unruh.

According to the CareerOneStop website that uses United States Bureau of Labor statistics, the median annual construction salaries in Tulare County as of May 2022 are \$45,710 for construction laborers, \$66,040 for building inspectors and \$100,660 for construction managers. (<https://www.careeronestop.org/Toolkit/Wages/find-salary.aspx>)



Brian Unruh, Construction Instructor  
College of the Sequoias



Martinez felt that everyone at COS was committed to helping her succeed. “Brian guided me through the steps to take to become a building inspector,” said Martinez. “He helped me study the International Residential Code (IRC) book and was always reachable when I needed help.”

Although construction is a non-traditional career for woman, it offers excellent pay and many opportunities for everyone, according to Martinez. “There were about three women in most of my classes,” said Martinez. “At first, the younger guys were challenging but eventually they saw that I was able to do all the work. It is important to stick with the right group of people who are supportive. When I saw women who worked as construction projects managers, I thought ‘if they can do it, so can I.’”

Bringing in role models and helping students make business connections is part of the program, according to Unruh. “Through our advisory board, we host speakers from industry, hold career fairs and connect students with employers that have positions to fill,” said Unruh. “Lisette Conway, student success coordinator, comes into the class to offer students help with resumes and finding jobs. She has her ear to the ground and knows about employment openings.”

The COS Access & Ability Center (AAC) also offers students support and academic accommodations. “The AAC made it possible for me to take a recorder into lecture in case I didn’t catch everything in my notes,” said Martinez. “They also arranged for someone to take notes that I could reference.”

Martinez recommends that students should not be afraid to ask for help. “School was always a challenge for me,” said Martinez. “In high school, I didn’t get the best grades and much preferred math and science to English and history. At COS, there is always help if you ask for what you need. College is not that hard when you put your mind to it, get help and stick with it.”

Now that Martinez completed the Associate of Science Construction Technology degree as well as the skill certificate in construction inspection, she works as a supervisor for Champion Home Builders, Inc. “We build four mobile homes per day,” said Martinez. “I oversee the workers and track our progress. Part of my job is checking that we meet specifications and comply with codes.”

Martinez really enjoys her work in construction and recommends the COS program to other students. “The construction field is where the money is as well as career opportunity,” said Martinez. “If you love what you are doing, it isn’t a job.”

She has big plans for the future. “Now, I’m at Fresno State in the Construction Management program,” said Martinez. “I hope to be a construction project manager for a big company. I’d like to work in a large city on skyscrapers or structural projects building roads and bridges.”

Unruh indicated that he stays in touch with students like Martinez to track their progress. “I am most proud of students who have an end goal, pursue it and then land a job,” said Unruh. “Sydney did what she said she would do and that’s encouraging for other students considering construction management careers.”

