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Triton College

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Triton College Dual Degree Program Fast-Tracks Student Success



Through Triton College's Dual Degree Program, Shahd Abualia, a senior at Ridgewood High School in Norridge, is on track to earning an associate degree in May, just as her high school classmates receive their diplomas.

RIVER GROVE, III. — Shahd Abualia of Harwood Heights isn't a typical high school student. Originally expected to graduate this spring, she earned her high school diploma early, in December. By the time her classmates walk across the stage, the first-generation college student also will have earned an associate degree.

Now 18, Abualia has her sights set on earning a Doctor of Pharmacy degree. If all goes according to plan, she expects to complete it in a little more than three years — before many of her college-bound peers earn a bachelor's degree.

"Dr. Shahd Abualia has a nice ring to it," she said.

Abualia is enrolled in Triton College's Dual Degree Program, which allows high school juniors and seniors to take college courses on Triton College's campus and earn an associate degree while completing requirements for their high school diploma. The program provides an accelerated path to completion, helping students reach their academic and career goals faster while saving time and money.

Offered through Triton's [Early College Department](#), the Dual Degree Program is part of a broader effort to expand access to transferable college credit before high school graduation. Programs such as [Dual Credit](#)—wherein students take college-level courses for credit at their high school—and [Dual Enrollment](#)—in which students take courses on Triton's campus—give students a head start on their college education while reducing overall costs.

Triton's Dual Credit program has grown from 462 students in 2017 to more than 3,000 this year. The Dual Degree Program, which launched three years ago with a cohort of five students, now serves more than 70 participants. For this academic year, 24 students will earn their associate degree, according to Brandie Windham, Triton College Dean of Early College Programs.

"Triton's Early College programs reflect the college's commitment to supporting students academically and personally while expanding workforce-aligned programs and increasing enrollment opportunities," she said. "These programs allow high school students to accelerate their academic goals, and we're here to support them every step of the way. I'm excited about the growth we're seeing across all of our Early College programs."

Abualia learned about the opportunity before her junior year at Ridgewood High School in Norridge and was immediately interested.

"I come from a family that really values education, and college is always something they wanted for me," she said. "I know that I want to get into the medical field, so I thought this was a great way to get ahead and save money."

Abualia's academic drive was shaped in part by her early experiences. For six years, she lived and attended school in Palestine, from fourth grade through her sophomore year of high school. Each day, she traveled 40 minutes from her village to attend school. Her commute often involved checkpoints and travel restrictions that sometimes prevented her from reaching school. That experience, she said, has had a significant impact on how much she values her education today.

"I'm very grateful for the opportunities that Ridgewood and Triton College have given me," she said. "This has opened a lot of doors for me. There's a great support system at Triton that made me feel at ease while balancing college and high school. I feel like I've changed so much in the past two years and have developed personally, professionally and academically."

Since enrolling in the Dual Degree Program, Abualia said she has grown more independent and confident. She utilized tutoring services through Triton's Academic Success Center for support in chemistry and calculus and found a strong sense of community on campus.

She is a member of Triton’s Phi Theta Kappa chapter and serves as co-president of Sisters MSA (Muslim Students Association), a student organization she recently co-founded.

“I think what sets Triton apart is the people and the opportunities you can find here,” she said. “Taking college classes as a high school student can be a bit scary, but everybody at Triton has been so welcoming.”

With her associate degree nearly complete, Abualia is already preparing for the next step toward her goal of becoming a pharmacist — well ahead of schedule and confident in the path she has chosen.

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ABOUT TRITON COLLEGE:

Triton College is a public institution of higher education dedicated to student success. Recently recognized by the Aspen Institute as one of the Top 200 community colleges in the nation, Triton offers more than 130 degree and certificate programs that prepare students to pursue meaningful careers, transfer to four-year universities, and thrive in a global economy. Guided by our mission—*Valuing the individual, educating and serving the community*—Triton serves nearly 17,000 students annually on its 110-acre campus in River Grove, Illinois. Our dedicated faculty and staff provide high-quality, accessible and affordable educational opportunities that empower students and strengthens the communities we serve. Triton College is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission and a member of The Illinois Community College Board. Illinois is home to 45 colleges in 39 community college districts. Learn more at triton.edu.