



## Utah Student and Graduate Profile

As a single mother with a young son, Rachael Lark worked hard, but never harder than when she was laid off from a major telecommunications provider back in 2002. Rachael was determined to create stability for her son and to give him a better future. So she made a plan, established her goals, and enrolled at Weber State University in Ogden, Utah. It was there that Rachael began taking Cisco® Networking Academy® classes. Within four years she earned a bachelor's of science degree in telecommunications administration and was on her way to earning her Cisco Certified Network Associate (CCNA®) certification. "The Cisco classes were probably the biggest contributors to my self-confidence," says Rachael.

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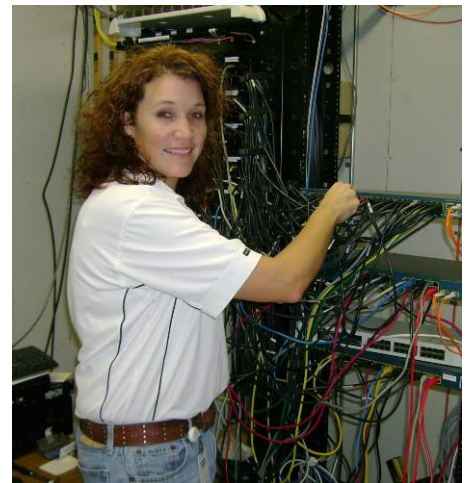
**Since Rachel had no prior knowledge or experience in networking, she was nervous about taking the Cisco classes, which were required as part of the telecom program. But Rachael could see that "technology is everywhere you turn, in everything you do. I wanted to be one of the people working in technology and to know the ins and outs of it. I knew that in order to grow my career, I would need to know technology."**

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Rachael first learned of the Networking Academy through the Weber State telecommunications administration program and her advisor and instructor, Ken Cuddeback. Since Rachel had no prior knowledge or experience in networking, she was nervous about taking the Cisco classes, which were required as part of the telecom program. But Rachael could see that "technology is everywhere you turn, in everything you do. I wanted to be one of the people working in technology and to know the ins and outs of it. I knew that in order to grow my career, I would need to know technology." So with Ken's encouragement and support, Rachael set out to learn networking and telecommunications.

"Watching Rachael grow over the past few years has been an inspiration for me. Seeing her tenacity inspired me to continue working on my Ph.D. knowing that her obstacles were far higher than my own," says Ken.

Being a single mother, working full-time, and attending school full-time made every day a challenge. It was a struggle at times, but Rachael took it day by day, class by class, and paper by paper. "I don't know how I did it," exclaims Rachael, "but I was determined to meet my goal and make a better life for my son and myself." Although the networking courses were challenging, she never gave up, and Rachael is now studying for the Cisco Certified Network Associate (CCNA®) certification exam, which she plans to sit for in 2008. As far as she knows, no woman at Weber State University has earned her CCNA® certification, and Rachael had made up her mind that she will be the first.



In retrospect, Rachael says what she enjoyed most about the Networking Academy was the "experience I gained, the knowledge I never ever imagined I would gain, and the friendships I made." She attributes her success to the course content, instructor, labs, and classmates. "I was able to gain hands-on experience with new and interesting equipment. Without the labs I don't know if I would have been able to fully grasp the ideas. The content and labs gave me a better understanding of what was being taught and to have a knowledgeable instructor available to help out only solidified my success," says Rachael. She especially enjoyed the labs and would deliberately mess something up so she could fix it, experimenting with different paths to solving the problem knowing that real-life situations would require multiple options to problem-solving.

A lot has changed for Rachael. Simply put, Rachael says “I am 100% more confident in everything I do.” She enjoys knowing that she can effectively collaborate with her co-workers as a peer, and that she has earned the respect of her colleagues. Recently married, Rachael is now employed as a telecommunication specialist for MarketStar Corporation and is responsible for the cellular equipment. With MarketStar’s plan to migrate to Cisco Call Manager, Rachael is excited about the experience she will gain assisting in the migration.

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When asked what advice she would give to others who might be interested in the Networking Academy, Rachael says “Don’t give up. No matter how difficult life becomes, don’t give up.”

For more information on the Networking Academy at Webster State University, go to:  
<http://departments.weber.edu/ce/pd/Cisco/default.htm>



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