

## MEET THE FREE MINDS CLASS OF 2016



**Joee Acosta** I was born in Georgetown. Being a single mother has always made it a challenge for me to come back to school. I kept putting it on the back burner, until one day a couple of my friends told me about Free Minds. They told me to submit my application, and I did. Vivé and Amelia gave me the opportunity to get my feet back into the routine of attending the inspirational classes of philosophy, creative writing, anthropology, and the craft of writing essays. Even though life kept trying to get in the way, Free Minds' great staff, teachers, and students encouraged me to keep my head up and make it to class each day. I'm glad I was able to participate in the Free Minds program. Thank You Free Minds faculty and staff!!



**Mary Alice Barrientez** I was born and raised in Austin. I have four daughters and two precious grandbabies. After high school, I attended ACC for a couple of years and enrolled in a medical assistant program, but I didn't complete either. I've known about Free Minds for a couple of years and always wanted to apply and even hung the flyer on our family calendar. Finally, one day, I took the time and applied and got accepted! I work full-time in the medical field and when you don't catch me at home, my husband and I are running around supporting the girls in multiple after-school activities. Somehow, I manage to fit some volunteer time in all that. I have many interests and passions—one that I LOVE doing the most is encouraging my girls do well in school. Free Minds has challenged me in many ways and changed my way of learning for the better.



**Tinisha Briggins** I was born and raised in Austin. I am a proud mother of two girls and one boy on the way (as of this writing). During my free time, I enjoy spending time with my family outdoors. After being out of college for six years and going through some life-changing events, a close friend sent me a link to sign up for Free Minds. This was the opportunity I needed to slowly adjust back into college. I was so blessed to be given the chance to join a wonderful group of people. Free Minds help me better my writing and critical thinking skills. I became extremely ill during my first trimester of pregnancy and thanks to the Free Minds staff and classmates they sent me videos and voice recordings of every class while I was out. Now I have the encouragement and confidence I need to reach my college goals. Thank you, Free Minds.



**Jill Davis** I was born and raised in Austin, moved to Houston in 2006 and came back to Austin in 2011 after a relapse with my paranoid schizophrenia. I love learning but didn't have the skills in my first go-round with college to get passing grades back in the 80s. I found out about Free Minds through the Black-owned newspaper, *The Villager*. Free Minds has been a blessing and has taught me that if I set my mind to a goal and do the work I can accomplish that goal. The professors care about us and that made the class so much more enriching. My classmates have been stupendous, and I have learned from each one of them as well. I look forward to going further in my education at ACC and volunteering in the Austin community. I enjoy attending church, learning, reading, writing poetry, and spending time with my four nieces and two nephews.



**Kyle Fuqua** I am originally from Houston, but I've lived in Austin for the last 24 years. I'm a personal trainer, a marathon runner, boxer, and an avid weight lifter. In 2002 I was briefly living back in Houston with no direction. I committed a robbery and served a three-year sentence. Since my release in 2006, school has always been something I felt I needed. Free Minds has given me the opportunity to get back in school, and I've since found my direction in the college fair they provided. This sense of purpose has kept me motivated along with the AMAZING staff in Free Minds. I love anatomy and helping others which is why I chose physical therapy as my major. Free Minds was a gift, but it's my job to cultivate that gift through hard work and dedication to reach my goals.



**DeAnna Guilbeau** I was born and raised in the San Francisco Bay Area. In the mid-1980s, I attended Contra Costa College. During what would have been my graduating semester, I had an accident which caused me to have to withdraw from school. I had always intended to go back, however, life prevailed. Cinderella married Prince Charming and sometime later moved to Austin. Shortly thereafter, I became a parent and decided to stay. Although Prince Charming fell off his horse and Cinderella turned into a single parent, I still yearned to go back to school. Free Minds has been the catalyst I needed to help propel me forward. I find that Free Minds has helped me become a better communicator. I find myself listening more intently as I speak now. I have noticed a great change I can only attribute to my time spent in the Free Minds program.



**Marisabel Gutierrez** I am mostly from Austin. I am a mother of three beloved girls and a wife to my best friend. Free Minds has been a life-altering experience. It has changed the way I used to measure the capableness I had to learn and has helped me to believe in myself as a student. My instructors kept me going, not wanting to let them and myself down was the fuel for going on. I loved the autobiography section, simply because I love reading about others in history and their mark on the world, whether it was significant or insignificant. I am passionate about making my existence count. Like Maya Angelou put it, "My mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive, and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor and style." My goal now is to keep on at ACC.

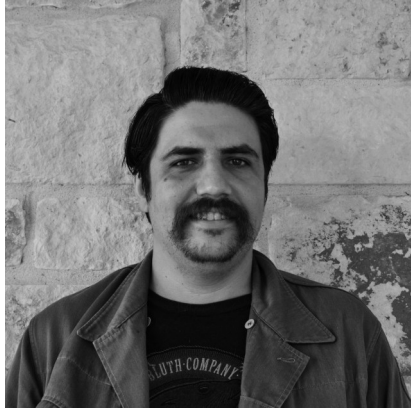


**Racquel Halverson** I am a mum, spouse, artist, crafter, and now a student! I've always felt as if I have been floating through life, never pursuing my passions and just trying to be content. I have pushed aside my education for ten years now, always coming up with one reason or another to not go. School is not my comfort zone. Since I have started Free Minds I have become more confident, and I have grown to love autobiographies. This program has opened my world up to so many possibilities. I never realized how much I love to learn. I finally feel smart enough to tackle more complicated books. I have gained so much support and knowledge through this program, its supportive staff, and classmates I have come to cherish. Because of

this mountain I have climbed, I am ready to tackle my degree and pursue my curiosity of the unknown. No more excuses, no more doubts.



**Jesse Huling** I was born near the final dam before the Colorado River drains into the Gulf of Mexico, and my first memories are of family and Oklahoma. I enrolled in college after a somewhat misspent youth and once again allowed myself to be misguided into putting education on the back burner ... that I had forgotten to ignite. Luckily, I've been allowed a second chance, a second chance down a path I never would've chosen for myself. And what a path! Now that the fire is lit again the path forward has become illuminated and education is waiting for me, and not me for it.

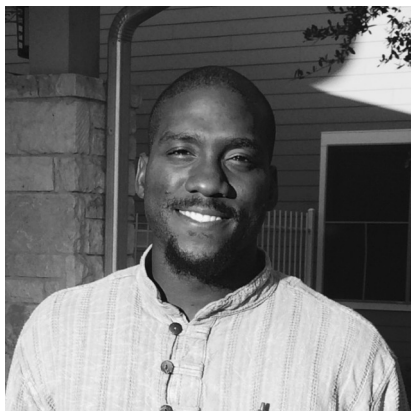


**Kevin Leib** I was born and raised in Austin by a very loving mother. I spend my days studying, reading, and doing origami. I also enjoy playing pool every now and then and was once on two pool teams in two different leagues. I joined Free Minds through the urging of my mother and father, who thought it would be helpful for me to start moving towards college. I had skipped college to go into the workforce early on in life, but have since really wished I had continued my education. Rather than jumping straight into Austin Community College, since it seemed such a daunting task, I joined Free Minds. I am so glad I did. It has prepared me for going into higher education with confidence and knowledge that I wouldn't have had if I had gone straight to ACC. I now have all the tools I need to succeed!



**Andrea Lujan** I entered the world in El Paso, from generations of poverty. Back-breaking labor often took the place of education. Providing for family is the wheel we run on. The day I birthed my twins was the day I hopped on that wheel, kissing a college education farewell. That is, until I ran into Free Minds eight years later. Starting college from where I stood, a single mom of three children, full-time provider among many other things made me believe "college isn't for me." Free Minds changed that. Free Minds has made me feel more than capable of accomplishing college-level assignments, toggling studies and life at the same time, having intelligent conversations with other students and staff, and using my

brain to explore thoughts outside of my normal day-to-day grind. I feel smart again and that has granted me the confidence a working adult with a family needs to tackle the challenging task of pursuing a higher education.

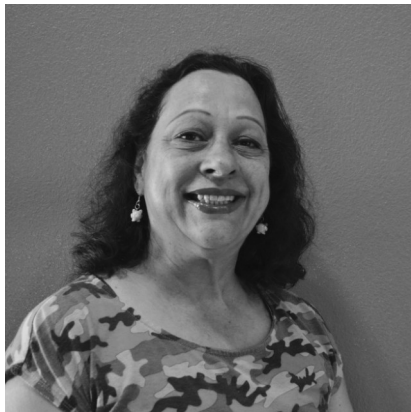


**Jonathan Noah** My journey with Free Minds started as I was entering the library and took notice of the little red and black flyer that read across the top "Awaken the student within." Those words spoke to an interest in doing better for myself, which had been stagnant and vexing me ever since I graduated high school 10 years ago. At the age of 27, taking up the challenge of being a student again felt like a step in the right direction. With much determination and effort, I'm proud to say that I've stepped my way across the finish line. It was not an easy task for sure. Had it not been for the support of the staff, I likely wouldn't have come this far. I plan to pursue writing and perhaps make a career out of it without

forgetting this rich experience involving all of the great Free Minds staff and fellow classmates!



**Brenda Perez** I grew up in South Austin and remember when it was still weird and the live music was loud and in downtown. I love to spend my free time all about Austin, catching film premiers at Alamo Drafthouse, hiking at the Greenbelt or running around Town Lake, and blowing every extra penny I make on books, comics, make up, tacos, and adventure! Free Minds helped pull me out of my comfort zone and gave me a chance to return to school and to meet new people, who I have come to trust, respect, and love but also the confidence to experience new things like the theater, museums. It helped reduce my fear of returning to college as an adult without feeling “out of place.” I plan to use this new-found confidence to pursue my passion for writing and collect more passport stamps.



**Shirley Trevino** I was born in Austin in 1958. I'm of Czech and Mexican decent. I worked at The Tamale House on Airport Blvd. from 1984 until its closing in April 2014. After that, with the help of UT Law, Score Organization, and CBI Academy, I started creating “the first worker-owned Tex-Mex cooperative in Austin, Texas.” I have taken classes with Skillpoint Alliance and Big Austin Start Smart Business, and I work full-time at Dan's Hamburgers. I've told my story with Tamale House through StoryCorps in the Library of Congress archives. Free Minds has benefited me with a new perspective on my communication, critical writing, and intense reading skills, while learning how to make deliberate choices. The

superior staff has definitely proven that education trains the brain. I look forward to opening Our Taco House Cooperative soon.