

Hartnell student goes from sleeping in car to Ivy League internships

[Cristian Ponce](#), [The Californian](#) Published 9:00 a.m. PT March 23, 2018 | Updated 1:48 p.m. PT March 23, 2018

All ages turned out for the first Salinas Anime-Comic Con, hosted by Ohana Comic Con. Wochit, Wochit



(Photo: Cristian Ponce/Staff photo)
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After eight years at Hartnell College, some personal challenges and a hefty amount of perseverance, Salinas native Louis Romero looks forward to contributing to the advancement of science after graduation.

It has been a long road, but 29-year-old Romero is proudly ending his tenure at the community college this semester with several unique academic accomplishments: an internship completed with Harvard, an upcoming internship at Yale and a recent first-place finish at a National Science Foundation's Emerging Researchers National Conference.

In February, Romero received first place in the Nanoscience and Physics Poster Presentation at the 2018 ERN Conference in Washington, D.C.

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Romero won the award with his research into two-dimensional binary transistors such as those that can be found in ordinary cellphones.

“It was on the fabrication of the thin film transistor, so that was when we were doing the electrostatic doping on the transistor,” said Romero.



Louis Romero receiving his first place award in the Nanoscience and Physics Poster Presentation at the 2018 ERN Conference in Washington, D.C. (Photo: Provided by/Louis Romero)

Romero is the only Hartnell student to complete an internship at Harvard University, which he did in 2017. The 10-week engineering program provided Romero with specialized training and also included workshops and lectures, he said.

“It was an amazing experience, I just hated the weather because it wasn’t California, but it was awesome,” said Romero. “I learned a lot and I got to network a lot with my peers.”

“He is one of the students I would hold up as an exemplar of what this program is for.”

Kathryn Hollar, director of community programs and diversity research at Harvard

Kathryn Hollar, director of community programs and diversity research at Harvard, said she met Romero two and half years ago before he began the internship. Hollar described Romero as the type of talent who could succeed with just a little encouragement.

“He is one of the students I would hold up as an exemplar of what this program is for,” said Hollar. “He is such a go-getter, it was such a pleasure to have in the program. Not only did he do a good job with the research but he was also a great community member.”

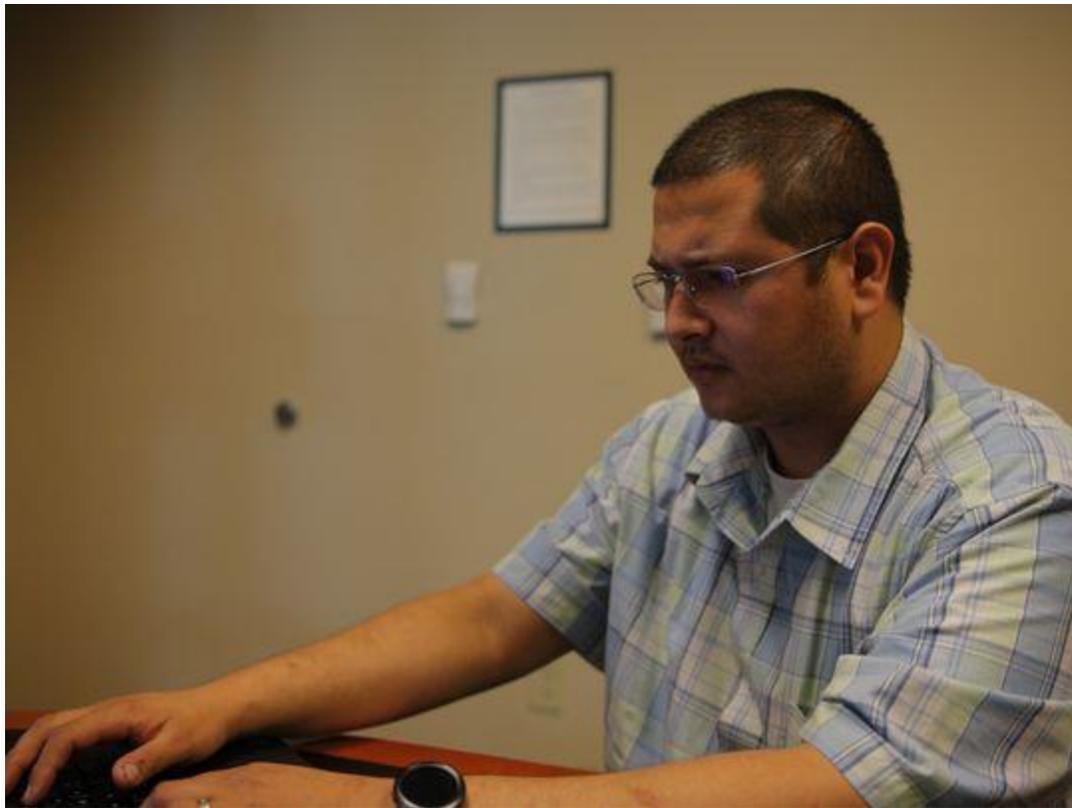
Romero was born in Salinas and raised in Greenfield by his parents Michael and Virginia Romero. He entered the U.S. Army right after graduating from Greenfield High School.

Romero said he wanted to join the military to earn money for college.

However, shortly after joining the military, Romero was 19-years-old when he had his first child with his wife and high school sweetheart, Angel.

At birth, Romero’s son Oscar had several health issues including missing two ribs and a lung, as well as having an extra finger.

His son wasn’t expected to survive but did so and is now thriving, said Romero. Angel and Romero now have three children: Oscar, Arianna and Sofia.



Hartnell student Louis Romero won first place at the 2018 ERN Conference in Washington D.C. (Photo: Cristian Ponce/Staff photo)

After leaving the Army, Romero started taking classes at Hartnell and working odd jobs while trying to take care of his family in Greenfield.

Romero said being able to afford housing became increasingly difficult. At one point, he had to live in his car for the whole semester while his wife and kids stayed with family.

Romero said he wasn't entirely sure what degree he wanted to pursue but participated in the three-year CSin3 program, a collaborative degree program with Hartnell and CSU Monterey Bay that has students earn their bachelor's degree for computer science.

His involvement in the program helped him to realize he was more interested in hardware and electrical engineering than programming. With this realization, Romero became fully invested in his education, and it's now paying off.

Romero is currently in the middle of an internship with IBM in San Jose. Romero said while the nature of the work he's doing is confidential, he said he's working to develop a special type of chip.

Once Romero wraps up his Hartnell career, Romero will then be participating in a 10-week summer internship with Yale.

"It's more of a biological internship where I will be applying my computer science skills," said Romero. "We'll be investigating the fruit flies' optical system."

Experts say there are a few things you can do to get accepted into the eight Ivy League schools these days. Sean Dowling (@seandowlingtv) has more. Buzz60

Romero said he's applied to eight schools to transfer to this fall but said his main destinations are UC Berkeley and UCLA. Romero will be moving his family with him wherever he decides to attend.

Despite his successes, Romero said he's hit many walls along the way, but his passion and his commitment to taking care of his family keep him going.

Hollar said Romero has a true passion for what he's chosen to pursue.

"One thing I appreciate about Louis is that he's not content to do the science for himself, he really thinks about how it's going to benefit society and he also likes to share his love of science with others," said Hollar. "Every time I had a volunteer opportunity to talk to kids or to high schoolers, he was there. He was there sharing what he likes about science so I

think that he is an amazing role model for any kid that may not think they're even interested in science.”

Hollar said she thinks Romero could be role model for adults as well because he's older than the typical student. Hollar said Romero doesn't care and dives right in.

A passion for inventing or assisting in the process of inventing something brings comfort to Romero.

“Whenever I'm at IBM, whenever I'm in the classroom teaching, I feel this happiness and this overwhelming joy because I'm contributing to the advancement of science and because I'm helping somebody succeed,” said Romero.

This article was amended to correct the year Romero completed the Harvard internship.