One of the college students onstage handing out the Oscars on Sunday was AJ Young, 23, of Mesa. A graduate of Dobson High and Mesa Community College, AJ now attends Columbia College in Chicago, where he’s studying to become a cinematographer. His parents and twin brother, DJ, live in Mesa.

We asked AJ this week about his experience.

**Question:** How’d you land the Oscar gig?

**Answer:** My mom found an article online about a Facebook contest in early December. It asked for a 30-second video to prove why the Academy should take me to the Oscars and what I bring to the table for the future of movies. I basically showed my best work and my concept for a new digital cinema camera.

**Q:** Have you always been interested in film? Tell us about some of your film exploits, acting, directing, writing, etc.

**A:** I’ve been interested in the entertainment industry since I was little. I’ve acted in school plays, done improv for three years at MCC including directing their troupe for one year, and have been doing cinematography for three years. (Scottsdale Community College) taught me a lot of the skills I use today as a cinematographer and Columbia is furthering my education from there.

**Q:** Who was the coolest person you met? Did any of the celebs take an interest in you, or were you treated kind of like wallpaper?

**A:** All of the celebrities were ridiculously nice! No one was stuck up at all. Meeting (famed cinematographer) Roger Deakins was pretty cool. He’s one of my idols for cinematography. Ben Affleck was incredibly interested in us. After he won best picture, he gave us incredible hugs and gave us an amazing pep talk about kicking ass in the industry.

**Q:** Did you get any good leads on film jobs? Any producers give you their business cards and say, “Call me?”

**A:** A few did! Mostly ad agencies, which is great because I would love to direct and do cinematography for commercials. A few short-film offers and possibly an independent feature film offer!

**Q:** How heavy are those statues? Were you afraid you’d drop one? Whose statues did you actually handle?

**A:** They are heavier than they look! I was afraid they would slip from my hand, but luckily I was able to keep a strong grasp. I handled the Oscars for Costume Design, Production Design, Foreign Language Film, and Best Actress.

**Q:** What’s your next movie project? Where can we see your work?
Hands-on Oscar role joy for Dobson grad

A: You can see my work at my website www.LuckyCockroach.com. The next project in the pipeline is a romantic comedy called The “Z” Word. The producer found me through Columbia’s talent program and hired me. I’m so excited to shoot this project.

Q: Tell us a little bit about your background and what you learned growing up in Mesa.

A: Growing up in Mesa taught me to be patient and value simplicity. Dobson High School gave me the confidence to reach for what I want, MCC gave me the education I needed, and SCC trained me to be a professional cinematographer. I would say Mesa, and SCC, are one of the few reasons why my career is starting to take off.

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- The Most Beautiful Celebrity Women over the age of 50 (She Budgets)
- 20 Cancer Symptoms Women Are Likely to Ignore (Reader’s Digest)
- Things We Should Probably Never Do Again After 50 (AARP.org)
- Queen Elizabeth II Leaves Hospital After Battling Stomach Infection (E! Online)
- Jennifer Love Hewitt wears a revealing dress as she grabs lunch on the set of ”The Client List” in Los Angeles (Zimbio)