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## **Guest View: Rio Hondo College adjusts to new accreditation standards**

By Ted Martinez Jr.

For the past several months, I have been visiting with school boards, city councils, and community service organizations to share information about the improvements we have been making to Rio Hondo College's instructional curriculum and to our physical environment.

These meetings provide me the opportunity to share details with community members about some of our recent successes, including winning the national Bellwether Award for our "Go Rio" program; receiving the first place award for the Rio Hondo Police Academy in Organizational Excellence from the California Commission on Peace Officers Standards and Training. We also recently began construction on the South Whittier Educational Center and will break ground on the Administration of Justice building later this month.

These visits have reassured me that our community is invested in Rio Hondo College and our future. I have been frequently asked about our Accreditation status and our plan to continue the delivery of higher learning and practical career-tech training we have provided community residents of all ages since 1963.

In fact, we are doing very well, but we are also undertaking a thorough evaluation of our program. Community colleges across the country are in transition, working to meet new accrediting standards, redefine accountability measures, instituting new planning processes and improving governance systems. We are no different.

A visitation team from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) completed its assessment of Rio Hondo College, providing recommendations and constructive criticisms of our measurable student learning outcomes and governance practices. We welcome constructive criticism, which in fact confirmed our planning assumptions about areas that needed improvement. However, even with a running start, the Accreditation Commission determined that we can make even more progress in a few areas.

As a result, Rio Hondo College, like several other community colleges, currently is adjusting to the new standards. We were placed on "warning" status, the least severe of the several sanctions the Commission might have applied.

The College's accreditation is not in jeopardy. "Warning" means that our students' credits will continue to be accepted by transfer institutions and our students remain eligible for financial aid while the institution works on the recommended improvements. We will be reviewed again in the Fall to reassure the Commission that we are making satisfactory progress. It is our intention to meet the goals set for us by the Commission and to receive a Reaffirmation of Accreditation at that time.

Be assured that the Rio Hondo College family of administrators, faculty, classified staff and students are working very closely with our Board of Trustees and the greater Rio Hondo community to ensure we are moving quickly and effectively to institute the improvements the Accrediting Commission expects.

We believe the WASC accreditation process provides an important opportunity to look at ourselves through the lens of a third party in order to keep improving and adjusting to meet current student and work force needs.

If you would like to know more about the accreditation process or review the accreditation report, the Commission's findings, or to review progress updates, please visit our website at <http://www.riohondo.edu/>. <<http://www.riohondo.edu/>> Rio Hondo College is a valued community asset which has been entrusted to this board, administration, staff and faculty. We are thankful for the opportunity to advance the College into the next phase of development, and I wish to express my appreciation for the continuing support we receive from our business and educational partners as well as from our elected officials.

Ted Martinez Jr. is president of Rio Hondo College in Whittier.

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