President’s Message

As we ended our 2014-15 academic year, May was a month of celebrations recognizing the many individuals who help make our College such an extraordinary center of education.

We began the month with the Rio Hondo College Foundation’s successful A Taste of Rio event, raising $56,000 to support our students’ pursuit of academic success during a relaxing evening under the stars.

Shortly after, we received approval of our four-year degree in automotive technology, part of a historic pilot program that includes 15 community college campuses. This new degree provides yet another pathway to success for our students, expansion to our already rich palate of educational opportunities.

Next, we turned our attention to our community of veterans, dedicating the long-awaited and much-heralded Rio Hondo College Veterans Memorial. I can’t express how wonderful it was to attend this event, surrounded by approximately 200 veterans, elected officials, community supporters, students, trustees, classified staff and administrators. Rio Hondo’s commitment to veterans has never been stronger. Now, that commitment is on display for all to see in this moving memorial at the center of our campus.

We concluded the month with our 52nd Commencement. Former Los Angeles County Supervisor Gloria Molina – an alum and long-time supporter of the College – provided words of wisdom to hundreds of graduates preparing for the next step in their collegiate journeys.

As so many College leaders stated on that day, these students embody the best of Rio Hondo College and stand as symbols of all we hope to achieve when we arrive at work every day.

Former Los Angeles County Supervisor Gloria Molina urged more than 600 graduates during Rio Hondo College’s 52nd Commencement on May 28 to follow her example and serve their communities as leaders, helping others who might struggle to achieve their dreams.

The graduating class includes students who earned Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees as well as nurses who have completed their training. More than 1,300 students earned their degrees in 2014-15, though not all could attend the ceremony.

Molina described her journey from high school to Rio Hondo College en route to 32 years of government service.

“I arrived to Rio Hondo College in 1966. As the oldest of 10, I had to set the example for my nine siblings,” said Molina, who recently retired from the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors after 23 years.

Molina said she struggled with college at first, but has since gone on to record many notable achievements — including being the first Latina to serve on the Board of Supervisors, the first Latina on the Los Angeles City Council and the first Latina elected to the state Assembly. She also served on the White House staff during President Jimmy Carter’s term.

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"I come here to speak to you not about my accolades, but about the importance of service," she said. "When I attended community college, I volunteered and worked at night."

Molina said her volunteer hours prepared her for leadership roles and helped the community.

"I hope that today as you celebrate your accomplishments, you think about how you will give back as a leader," she concluded. "You are going to find your hidden talents as you volunteer and serve your community."

Rio Hondo College Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss praised graduates for completing this stage of their educational journey — and encouraged them to continue to dream big.

"Many of you are the first to set foot on a college campus, and the first to graduate from college — making one of yours and your family’s dreams come true," Dreyfuss said. "Be prepared to reach for the impossible."

Rio Hondo Associated Students President Alejandro Ramirez exhorted his classmates to be ready for new challenges as they transition to four-year universities or the workforce.

"We will continue to face obstacles that will get in our way, and how we face those obstacles will continue to define who we are," he said. "We need to strive to be the greatest person that we can be and continue to encourage those after us to continue to do great."

The ceremony also included recognition of faculty and students.

Dean of Mathematics and Sciences Karen Koos was named Fellow of the College, an honor recognizing individuals who make outstanding contributions to the progress and development of the College.

Koos, hired in 1980 as a biology instructor, helped reshape instructional materials, craft rigorous classes and revamp the College’s environmental technology program. Under her term as dean, the MESA/TRiO program was established to support first-generation and low-income undergraduates seeking to transfer to four-year colleges in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields.

The commencement ceremony included 40 MESA graduates, representing about a quarter of the students currently in the STEM program.

Academic Senate President Dr. Vann Priest presented the Marie I. Pelissier Award to the class valedictorian, Ly Tran Nguyen.
A Trio of Extraordinary Graduates

Three Rio Hondo graduates have been given special recognition for their extraordinary academic excellence and dedication to overcoming adversity en route to earning their degrees.

The students — nominated by Rio Hondo College faculty and staff — were announced by Vice President of Student Services Henry Gee during the College’s 52nd Commencement exercises on May 28.

Louie Arredondo

Louie Arredondo is a first-generation student from Huntington Park, where he received limited opportunities for success. Raised in biting poverty by his grandparents, he veered down a challenging path as a teen that took him away from his educational goals.

But, with sheer grit and dedication, he redirected his life toward academic achievement, and enrolled in Rio Hondo College. Eleven months ago, he joined the College’s MESA/TRiO program, which provides support for low-income and first-generation students who are pursuing degrees in science, technology, engineering and math fields.

Arredondo quickly excelled, becoming an extremely active member noted for his dedication to the program and his knack for helping peers grasp challenging concepts.

He plans to study electrical engineering at a four-year university.

Diana Escamilla

Diana Escamilla is an undocumented student who benefited from California’s Dream Act during her time at Rio Hondo College. While at Rio Hondo she has been an active member of Student Ambassadors and Students Without Borders. She also has volunteered at local high schools, helping local families to complete Dream Act applications for financial aid.

She is recognized as a leader and role model who draws on her undocumented status as motivation to continue her education and promote change for others in her situation.

In fact, after being accepted to all of the universities she applied to — including two with Dream Centers — Escamilla chose Cal Poly Pomona because it is still assembling its resources for Dreamers. She is hoping to become part of efforts to create Cal Poly’s Dream Center, helping to shape the services as effectively as possible.

Sgt. Susana Galvez

U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Susana Galvez joined the Marines because the Corp offered her a chance to become something greater, an opportunity to find her strengths and excel. And she brought those opportunities to fruition, rising up the ranks as a leader of her brothers and sisters.

But the strength of her bonds with her fellow Marines also deepened the horror of her time on the front lines, during the U.S. deployment to Iraq. She will never forget the fear, the constant threat from enemies who robbed her of friends and comrades.

Galvez is equally marked by the desperate struggles of so many veterans upon their return to the U.S., the challenges faced in rejoining society — including those who lose their fight to re-assimilate, taking their own lives.

Remarkably, Galvez has taken the pain of both experiences and turned them into a driving passion to help her fellow veterans. To that end, she pursued her Associate of Arts degree in sociology at Rio Hondo, and plans to pursue her education through to a Ph.D. in sociology — with the goal of easing the struggles of her brothers and sisters in arms as they transition from war to civilian life.
Rio Hondo College's Board of Trustees in May recognized the College’s forensics speech and debate team, honored retiring faculty, staff and managers, reviewed plans for integrating computer-adaptive technology in basic math classes and added priority registration for a new group of students.

Trustees praised members of Rio Hondo’s speech team, which made program history at the 2015 Phi Rho Pi National Forensics Tournament in Ohio. The team won the silver sweepstakes in the Hindman Division’s Individual Events category, achieved through speaker points earned by team members throughout the event. Students Samantha Recinos and Kimberly Valencia each earned bronze medals for two-person parliamentary debate while Andrew Perez took bronze medal in individual, international debate.

The debate team also includes: Felix R. Rodriguez, Daniel Ybarra, Pedro Huerta, Christopher A. Rodriguez, Ceasar Sanchez, Jose A. Larios and Alexandar J. Cadena. The team is led by Forensics Coordinator Libby Curiel and Debate Coach Grant Tovmasian.

The Board of Trustees recognized the College’s Marketing and Communications Department and its star intern Jessica Estrada for placing third in the statewide Community College Public Relations Organization PRO Award in the TV PSA/AD category.

The Rio Hondo promotional video has served as an integral part in the College’s outreach, recruitment and marketing efforts. It has played on the big screens in movie theaters throughout the District, during the 2015 community educational forums, on social media platforms and has been seen by many on the College website.

The Board also honored retirees, including English Professor Beverly Reilly, to whom it awarded the Distinguished Faculty Award. Reilly, who worked for 25 years as a nurse, switched careers after taking community college classes in the classics. She started at Rio Hondo in 1983, helped run the College’s Learning Resource Center’s writing center and manage the River’s Voice student literary journal.

Also retiring from Rio Hondo this year:

**Faculty**
- Elaine Hemenway – Mathematics and Sciences
- Jim Chandler – Communications and Languages
- John Bennett – Public Safety
- John Parra – Counseling, Student Services
- Patrick McConnell – DSP&S, Student Services
- Sylvia Duran-Katnik – Veterans, Student Services

**Classified staff**
- Marsha Folts – Information Technology

**Management**
- Connie Austin – Health Sciences & Nursing
- Karen Koos – Math Sciences

Board members listened to a presentation from math instructor Matt Pitassi, who described how he used his sabbatical to explore new ways of teaching basic math lessons.

Several years ago, Pitassi helped the College pioneer the use of an online tool that allowed students to learn math at their own pace, but the tool was linear – meaning students had to proceed through it step by step regardless of whether they possessed significant skills or weaknesses in certain areas.

As a result, students were often frustrated by their progress and success rates remained flat.

So, during his recent sabbatical, Pitassi explored the strengths of a non-linear tool called ALEKS, which assesses student skills, maps strengths and weaknesses, and adjusts question difficulty based on performance.

The assessments and continuous, immediate feedback allow Pitassi to provide more specific, directed guidance when students face challenges; the program’s non-linear structure allows students to speed through areas of strength without being blocked by topics that pose greater challenges.

Pitassi has been using ALEKS since fall 2014, achieving significantly stronger success rates than under the old format. Now, he is working on ways to expand the tool’s use to other math classes.

At the close of the board meeting, trustees also expanded the College’s priority registration program to include students who are in the final semester and who do not fall under the other priority status groups. This will help students who are concluding their programs at Rio Hondo College.
Bachelor of Science in Automotive Technology Launched

New lead: Rio Hondo College educators are busily planning the courses required for the College's new four-year degree in automotive technology, which received final approval in May from the California Community Colleges Board of Governors to take part in a historic statewide pilot program.

The College will continue offering lower-division courses this fall and begin to offer upper-division courses in fall 2016 for the Bachelor of Science, once the program is reviewed by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges.

The degree program, which includes 14 additional community college campuses, was authorized by Senate Bill 850 as a way to train a new generation of graduates for high-demand technical jobs that increasingly require bachelor degrees.

“This new four-year degree will expand upon Rio Hondo College’s thriving automotive technology program to prepare a new generation of students for jobs that will be the foundation of rewarding careers and meet a critical need of our economy,” said Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss.

Rio Hondo College’s program will offer concentrations in management and technical expertise as it prepares students for a variety of positions with automotive, sea and rail transit companies.

Under SB 850, signed by Gov. Jerry Brown in early October, community colleges chosen for the pilot effort must launch bachelor programs by 2017-18 and sunset them by July 2023. The legislature and governor may renew the program after review.

Rio Hondo College’s existing automotive technology program draws 300 students annually for certificate courses and two-year degrees. Enrollment has climbed about 20 percent over the last five years as new components — including one on alternative fuels — have been added.

“The new degree will take this extraordinarily popular program to a new level — one that will be highly valued by the region’s automotive companies,” said Mike Slavich, Rio Hondo College’s Dean of Career and Technical Education.

The degree will equip graduates for a variety of positions with auto manufacturers, car dealers or aftermarket companies that modify vehicles — companies that typically demand four-year college degrees when hiring, but which often have to train new employees because of the lack of comprehensive technical degree programs.

Positions include field service operations, fleet management, technical support activities, service/parts management, sales and marketing. Many of the jobs require a mesh of technical skills and understanding of customer service and needs.

Among the auto companies headquartered here are Kia, Hyundai and Honda, which partners with Rio Hondo’s two-year program. Toyota, Ford and Mazda also have strong programs in the region. The area is home to the Specialty Equipment Market Association, a trade association that includes manufacturers, distributors, retailers, auto restorers, street-rod builders, restylers, car clubs and race teams.

Students are expected to take 65 units in lower-division courses at the current fee of $46 a unit and about 60 units in upper-division courses at a cost of $84 a unit to qualify for graduation.

At those fees, a bachelor’s degree offered through the community college — including other fees and books — will cost about $10,000. That’s less than two years’ tuition at CSU and less than a year’s tuition at UC.

It is estimated California needs 1 million more tech-oriented graduates to remain competitive. The legislation specifies such fields as health, biotech and public safety.

Community colleges in 21 states already offer four-year degrees.

RIO IN THE NEWS! Click here to read more about Rio Hondo College’s Bachelor of Science degree in EGP News.

RIO IN THE NEWS! Click here to read more about Rio Hondo College’s Bachelor of Science degree in The Los Angeles Times.
Veterans Memorial Unveiled

Rio Hondo College celebrated the completion of its long-awaited Veterans Memorial at a special ribbon-cutting and flag-raising ceremony on May 20 attended by College leaders, members of the Board of Trustees and about 200 veterans, students and community supporters.

“I’m delighted that we have this moment to celebrate the veterans,” Rio Hondo College Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss said. “This memorial stands as a tribute to the contributions of America’s armed forces and helps to celebrate the warm relationship between the College and the veterans in its student body.”

During the ceremony, members of the El Monte Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 10218 presented and posted the colors and veterans from the College’s staff and student body raised flags to the backdrop of the National Anthem – one for the U.S., one for California and one for Rio Hondo College.

The idea of the memorial grew from several sources. Championed by a member of the Board of Trustees for more than a decade, it received impetus in 2013 when Veterans Club President Robert Diaz was asked by a fellow veteran about the seeming lack of a U.S. flagpole.

Diaz investigated, discovered the flagpole was obscured near the campus administration building, and began to campaign for a new flagpole in a more prominent and visible location. But, going beyond that vision, the campus launched its two-year effort to erect the trio of flagpoles and memorial at the center of campus.

Diaz personally secured a U.S. flag that flew over the U.S. Capitol Building on President’s Day from U.S. Rep. Linda Sanchez’s office. A California state flag was provided by Assemblywoman Cristina Garcia.

“I see the memorial and its flags as a place where veteran-students can reflect upon their pasts and their futures, a place where non-veteran students can identify with the trials and tribulations of those who served our country with an aim of preserving the freedoms we all enjoy,” Diaz said during the ceremony.

The memorial, which sits at the center of the campus, includes several elements: A concrete monument that stretches 8 feet long and rises 3 feet high topped with a brass plaque and bearing discs for each of the five branches of the U.S. military; a bench where students and guests may reflect on the contributions of the nation’s veterans; and the three flagpoles.

The first 150 who attended the event received specially minted Challenge Coins, part of a long-standing military tradition, custom made for military units and depicting symbols and mottos unique to each unit. Issuing a Challenge Coin has become popular at civilian functions, especially events that commemorate public safety programs.

Student Named 2015 Veteran of the Year

Rio Hondo College student Marina Armendariz has been named the 2015 Veteran of the Year for the 49th Assembly District by Assemblyman Ed Chau. Armendariz will be recognized June 24 at the eighth annual California State Assembly Veteran of the Year event at the Sacramento Convention Center.
A Taste of Rio Raises $56,000

About 300 community members, College and elected officials raised $56,000 for student scholarships and support services during the Rio Hondo College Foundation’s A Taste of Rio wine and food tasting event.

The May 1 event featured savory and sweet fare from California Grill, Catering by Herach and Ara, Clearman’s Steak ‘N Stein, Edible Arrangements, Manuel’s Original El Tepeyac Café, Frantone’s, Juan Great Fiesta, La Casita Olvera, Lucky Treats, Luna Estrella, Zapien’s Salsa Grill, Seta Dine Lounge, Sodexo and Sweet Dreams.

In each of its first two years, A Taste of Rio raised about $35,000 to assist Rio Hondo students.

“A Taste of Rio is a wonderful addition to the array of programs that help support and celebrate Rio Hondo College,” said Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss. “Its contribution to our students is significant and its fostering of community among our supporters is extraordinary.”

During the event, Dreyfuss encouraged attendees to take the time to read a “Faces of Rio” display highlighting exceptional students and their stories of struggle, persistence, commitment and determination to achieve the “American Dream.”

Sponsors included: Cognoscente Level ($10,000) – Del Terra, Westberg & White Architects; Connoisseur Level Sponsor ($5,000) – Southern California Edison; Aficionado Level ($2,500) – Atkinson, Andelson, Loya, Rund and Romo, Bank of the West, Keenan & Associates, Los Angeles County 4th District Supervisor Don Knabe, RBC Capital Markets and SVA Architects; Appreciator Level ($1,500) Interior Office Solutions and Vasquez & Company, LLP; Taster Level ($500) – David and Jacqueline Brearley, Lyla Eddington, Halbert Hargrove Global Advisors, Los Angeles County 1st District Supervisor Hilda Solis; PMSM Architects, Ran Graphics, Rose Hills Memorial Park & Mortuaries, Rio Hondo College Faculty Association and Whittier Union High School District.
Student Success Celebration

About 100 Rio Hondo students preparing to transfer to four-year universities attended the College’s annual Student Success Celebration.

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Serving the communities of

• El Monte
• South El Monte
• Pico Rivera

and portions of:

• Norwalk
• Downey
• La Mirada
• City of Industry
• Los Nietos*

• Santa Fe Springs
• Whittier

• East Whittier*
• South Whittier*
• West Whittier*
• Avocado Heights*

*Unincorporated communities within our District

Mission Statement

Rio Hondo College is committed to the success of its diverse students and communities by providing dynamic educational opportunities and resources that lead to associate degrees, certificates, transfer, career and technical pathways, basic skills proficiency, and lifelong learning.

Chinese Club Celebrates End of Year with Picnic

Rio Hondo Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss attended the Chinese Club’s end-of-year picnic on Wednesday, May 13 in the lawn area behind the Administration building. Chinese Club President Robbie Godoy, Faculty Adviser Robert Ho and several club members chatted with President Dreyfuss, in English and Mandarin, while sharing a variety of Chinese dishes.