President’s Message

As we celebrate the holidays, let me be the first to share my appreciation for the incredible team of educators and staff who create the core of our community at Rio Hondo College. These dedicated individuals commit their time and energy not only to the ongoing education of our students, but also to ensuring our College provides every foreseeable opportunity for those students.

This month’s update captures just a few of those efforts that span the spectrum of our mission: Faculty and staff collaborated to create a new major in cybersecurity, a quickly growing professional field; they are helping students map their college careers through our Avance program; they are training skilled firefighters and police officers; and they are being honored for connecting students with financial aid resources.

In addition to this, our students honored alumni veterans and an alumni veteran helped donate Thanksgiving meals to veteran students – illuminating the circle of care that is so characteristic of our College community.

So, on behalf of these dedicated staff and faculty members, let me wish all members of our extended community the happiest of holidays and thank you for making a difference every day.

Avance Students Explore College Pathways

Poster boards constructed by 279 students filled the Campus Inn during the second annual Avance Student Showcase on Nov. 16 and 17, describing not only their goals for transfer to four-year colleges, but the academic disciplines they hope to follow, statistics on admission, requirement details and even housing information.

Posters featured University of Maryland’s journalism program, UC Berkeley’s linguistics program, and the biology, nursing and computer science programs at UCLA.

Avance, in its second year, is designed to expand Rio Hondo College’s capacity for fostering student success through a year-long integrated and connected success pathway for first-year students to persist into their second year. Avance is Spanish for advance.

The showcase is one element of the effort, which includes participation in a summer college preparation class and a counseling class.

The event opened with welcoming remarks and special acknowledgement of the Avance counselors and success coaches by Assistant Dean of Student Success & Retention Barbara Salazar, who is also director of the Avance program.

Next, students listened to an inspiring address from Ryan Rivera and Arlette Raygoza, two continuing students from the Avance program’s first cohort one year ago. In addition to maintaining academic excellence, Rivera writes for Rio Hondo’s El Paisano newspaper and Raygoza is involved in student life and leadership as a peer advisory leader (PAL) and a Summer Bridge peer mentor for incoming students.

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Board Report

Rio Hondo College’s Board of Trustees thanked retiring faculty and staff members for their years of service during their Nov. 8 meeting.

Steve Katnik, a biology professor, is retiring after more than 31 years of service. Katnik, hired in 1986, has also served as Rio Hondo College’s director of environment and environmental technology coordinator. Pam Boyd, a nursing professor, is retiring after 16 ½ years of service.

Also retiring are custodian Pho Truong, who was with Rio Hondo College for 15 ½ years, and senior grounds maintenance worker Kevin Hill, who was with the College for 23 ½ years.

The trustees also bid farewell posthumously to human resources technician Dolores Aguirre, who passed away after serving the College for 17 ½ years.
Rio Hondo College educators have developed plans to offer a cybersecurity certificate and degree program in fall 2018 to help meet rapidly growing demand for technical experts capable of shielding sensitive electronic data.

“This effort reflects the creative and innovative approach that is a hallmark of Rio Hondo College’s faculty,” Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss said. “We are looking not only at the needs of today’s students and our industry partners, but at the needs expected to develop over the coming years, and then shaping instruction to match.”

The program spans 26 courses in information technology, math, accounting and business law; it includes certificates earned for completing several sequences of the classes, including one for “ethical hacking.” The College plans to offer Associate of Science degrees in cybersecurity and information technology, featuring courses in computer, server and network security.

The College’s announcement comes during the first-ever National Cybersecurity Career Awareness Week, which aims to spark interest in the career field’s potential.

“Cybersecurity is an increasingly important career field – the data breaches at Home Depot, Target and Equifax all testify to that,” Computer Information Technology Assistant Professor Rudy Rios said. “But there’s a vast unmet demand for trained professionals. Even if all California community colleges had programs, we still couldn’t fill the need.”

Experts estimate a global shortage of 2 million cybersecurity professionals by 2019. In California, more than 31,000 jobs are currently unfilled, according to industry tracker Cyberseek.org. Some experts estimate California’s unmet need will rise to 45,000 positions in the next five years and climb by 10 percent each year after that.

Rios, who is part of the team mapping out the program, said Rio Hondo College developed the plan in consultation with an advisory committee of industry professionals. Now, a consortium of Los Angeles area community colleges is reviewing the plan to ensure it doesn’t overlap or duplicate other programs.

The next step will be a review by the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office, which Rios expects to go smoothly because the programs follow the California Model Curriculum. The model is also followed by Cal State San Bernardino, one of a handful of California colleges to offer cybersecurity degrees.

The effort is funded through a workforce development grant from the Chancellor’s Office. As part of that effort, Rio Hondo College is buying advanced NDG Netlab tools that virtually simulate the environments students will need to master, including routers, switches, servers and client computers.

The College will collaborate for the simulations with the LA/OC Regional Netlab Hub at Orange County’s Coastline Community College, which is a designated Center of Academic Excellence in Cyber Defense.

Rio Hondo College’s cybersecurity courses include a mix of new classes and foundational instruction from its existing business, informational technology and math programs. The combination of degrees and certificate programs will prepare students to enter the workforce in entry-level positions or continue their studies at a four-year school.

RIO IN THE NEWS! Click here to read more about Rio Hondo’s Cybersecurity Training in the Whittier Daily News.
Fire Academy Cadet Reunited with Firefighter Who Saved Him

Spencer Nail’s journey to becoming a firefighter started 25 years ago, when he was rescued by firefighter Tom Spencer from a car accident. This month, the two were reunited when Nail crossed the stage Nov. 4 as a graduate of Rio Hondo College’s Fire Academy.

Nail was just 2 when an auto accident left him pinned under a car.

“He was ejected from the vehicle, landed on the freeway and the vehicle landed on his head,” his mother, Lysa Tribolet, told ABC News.

Tom Spencer was off duty when he came upon the accident.

“They said there’s a baby under there, man. I got down on the ground to coordinate it and asked them to lift slowly and pulled Spencer out,” he told the news channel.

Spencer gave the child CPR, but Nail lapsed into a coma and wasn’t expected to live. Instead, Nail made a full recovery.

The firefighter and child last met when Nail was 3.

“We all believed he was his guardian angel,” Tribolet said.

Now 28, Nail has followed in the footsteps of his hero.
Report Lauds College’s Effort to Boost College Access

Rio Hondo College is featured in the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation’s “Making College Affordable” report published in November. The report, which contains a foreword by former Obama White House education adviser Zakiya Smith, shares 11 best practices institutions can take to help students pay for college and stay in school.

Rio Hondo is featured on page 4 of the report as a college that offers financial aid text notifications to help many students who would otherwise drop out. A link from the report takes readers to Rio Hondo College’s financial aid page.

College VP Honored for Lifetime Service to Students

Henry Gee, Rio Hondo College’s vice president of student services, has received the Fred Turner Award for Outstanding Service from the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) Region VI Western Regional Conference. The award, named for a past chairman of the NASPA Board of Directors, is akin to a lifetime achievement award, honoring a NASPA member who has served in leadership roles at state, regional, national or international levels of NASPA and who has been a part of the group for 10 years.

Gee previously won NASPA’s Scott Goodnight Award, which honors sustained professional achievement in student affairs, innovative response to meeting student needs, effectiveness in developing staff and leadership in community and college affairs.

Tavera Family Provides Thanksgiving Baskets to College Veterans

Twenty-five Rio Hondo College students received Thanksgiving baskets with all the trimmings on Nov. 16, thanks to the Tavera family. Mark Tavera, U.S. Army veteran and a 2015 Rio Hondo College graduate, raises funds throughout the year to give the baskets to students who also served. Tavera lives in South El Monte with his wife, Rosemary, their four children, and 10 grandchildren.
13 Recruits Graduate from Police Academy

Rio Hondo College’s Police Academy on Nov. 16 graduated 13 recruits who will serve with law enforcement agencies across the region.

Academy Class 205 is the second of two academies conducted this year. Class 204, which included 39 recruits, graduated in August.

The November graduates include sponsored cadets who were hired by agencies before enrolling at Rio Hondo as well as cadets who were hired during their attendance and after graduation.

The cadets are:

- Alexis Arellano, Cal State University, Northridge Police Department
- Kyle Belleville, Pomona Police Department
- Christopher Brancke, Signal Hill Police Department
- Noah Caprio, Westminster Police Department
- Carlos Garcia, Pomona Police Department
- Adam Gonzalez, undergoing background check for Montclair Police Department
- Christian Jacso, undergoing background check for Montclair Police Department
- Brandon Marrufo, Bell Police Department, hired while attending the academy
- Armando Miranda
- Jorge Ramirez, Signal Hill Police Department, hired while attending the academy
- Jim Rivera, Burbank Police Department
- Jason Tamayo, Huntington Park Police Department, hired while attending the academy
- Marissa Velez – Vernon Police Department

The next academy class begins studies on Jan. 30, 2018.

Chamber Presents Foundation with $1,700

The El Monte/South El Monte Chamber of Commerce presented Rio Hondo College Foundation with a generous gift of $1,700 on Nov. 1. Rio Hondo College Foundation Director of Development Cynthia Nickell accepted the award, given during the Chamber’s monthly breakfast meeting. Pictured with Nickell are Ken Rausch, executive director of the chamber and Leo Barrera, president of the chamber.
A new Rio Hondo College program – one of just 16 available at California community colleges—aids students directly or indirectly affected by the justice system in navigating their educational pathway.

The program, called Reaching Institutionalized Students in Education (RISE) Scholars, is the brainchild of academic success coach Joe Louis Hernandez, who presented a talk about the effort during the National Association of Student Personnel Administrator (NASPA) Western Regional Conference in Hawaii in November.

Hernandez started working at Rio Hondo College in fall 2016. His primary task was to follow up with students on academic probation. The effort, and Hernandez’ own experience with the justice system, led him to inquire about services for formerly incarcerated students.

That led to the creation in spring 2017 of the RISE Scholars Task Force, a group of faculty, staff, students and administrators who assessed the College’s efforts to support students affected by the justice system. The task force discovered students in various academic programs who needed aid navigating academic goal pathways and addressing the challenges of employment post degree/certificate completion.

Hernandez led efforts by the task force to build a network of college and community allies that has collaborated to develop a pilot wrap-around service model to serve formerly incarcerated students and to provide a student panel and expungement clinic.

This fall, Hernandez began sharing Rio Hondo College’s efforts at professional development conferences, including the So Cal Western Association of Educational Opportunity Personnel Development Seminar in San Diego in October.

For more information on RISE Scholars, contact Hernandez at jlhernandez@riohondo.edu.