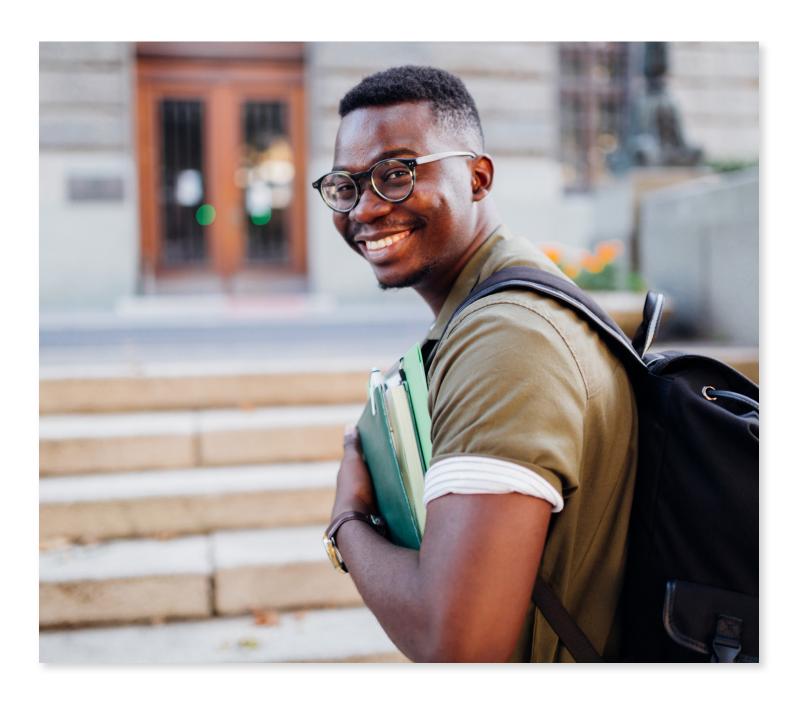# Quality Focus Essay

H. Quality Focus Essay

Introduction of Projects

The selection of the two Quality Focus Essay (QFE) projects is grounded in the College's internal and external data, standards of performance, and its annual self-examination processes. Program planning and program review occur annually at Rio Hondo College and are the primary means by which the College monitors its effectiveness. Through these processes, programs are asked, among other things, to examine achievement outcomes and to compare program performance over time, to other similar programs, and to standards of performance. At Rio Hondo College, standards of performance include overall institutional performance, program specific standards, identified achievement gaps for historically under-represented students, and the College's ACCJC institution set standards.

During the course of annual self-examination, as well as a variety of college-wide summits related to student equity, the College has come to understand that its approach to improving its achievement outcomes has tended toward program-specific rather than institutional approaches, resulting in minor gains. Progress on several key achievement metrics, such as student completion, has been slower than anticipated (see for example Table I-13 in Presentation of Achievement Data). Therefore, the College has shifted toward an equity mindset and an institution wide approach in both professional development and instruction.

Additionally, the College examines external data and community demographic trends at regular intervals, such as during strategic planning, as well as during the development of its Educational Master Plan. The most recent examination of community demographic information occurred during 2019-2020, with the development of the College's new Educational Master Plan. This analysis revealed that the College has some unique characteristics. First, the College serves several service area cities with higher poverty rates than that of Los Angeles County and many of the College's feeder high schools also report that more than 50% of their student populations qualify for free or reduced priced meals (see Tables QFE-1 and QFE-2).

Table QFE-1. Key Population Characteristics Five Service Area Cities (2018)

	El Monte	South El Monte	Pico Rivera	Whittier	Santa Fe Springs	Five city range	Five city average
Population	115,586	20,767	62,888	86,064	17,832	97,754	60,627
Median Age	35.4	34.3	36.3	36.8	36.4	1.4	36
Avg Household Size	3.9	3.9	3.7	3	3.4	.9	3.6
Median Household Income	$43,504	$44,651	$61,586	$69,058	$63,540	$25,554	$56,468
Foreign Born	50%	43%	31%	17%	27%	33	33.6%
Poverty	22.6%	18.7%	10.6%	12.1%	13.9%	12.6%	15.6%
Unemployment	4.1%	4.2%	4.9%	4.5%	4.6%	.8%	4.5%
Travel Time(mins.)	30.7	29.5	30.9	32.7	30.5	3.2	30.9
Veterans	1.4%	2.3%	2.8%	3.5%	2.7%	2.1%	2.5%
Computers	78.9%	76.9%	85.3%	88%	87.9%	11.1%	83.4%
Broadband	68.6%	65.1%	72.7%	78.3%	75.8%	9.7%	72.1%

Table QFE-2. Unduplicated Headcount of Free or Reduced-Price Meals in Area K12 districts – (2019-20)

District name	School name	Enrollment	Free or reduced meal count	% Eligible for free or reduced meal
El Monte Union High	Arroyo High	1,906	1,614	85%
Whittier Union High	California High	2,813	2,024	72%
El Monte Union High	El Monte High	1,732	1,642	95%
El Rancho Unified	El Rancho High	2,297	1,514	66%
Whittier Union High	La Serna High	2,566	1,281	50%
El Monte Union High	Mountain View High	1,253	1,160	93%
Whittier Union High	Pioneer High	1,181	988	84%
El Rancho Unified	Ellen Ochoa Prep Academy	128	96	75%
Whittier Union High	Santa Fe High	2,054	1,486	72%
El Monte Union High	South El Monte High	1,198	1,075	90%
Whittier Union High	Whittier High	1,831	1,371	75%

Finally, the College is located in an area of Los Angeles County where the percentage of Latinx residents exceeds the rate for the county as a whole. This is also reflected in the College's student population (see Tables QFE-3 and QFE-4 below).

Table QFE-3. Ethnic and Racial Composition of Los Angeles County and Five Service Area Communities (2017)

Race/Ethnicity	Los Angeles Co.	El Monte	South El Monte	Whittier	Pico Rivera	Santa Fe Springs	West Whittier-Los Nietos (CDP)	South Whittier (CDP)
Black or African American alone	8%	0.5%	0.1%	1%	0.7%	4%	.8%	.7%
American Indian & Alaska Native alone	0.2%	0.08%	0.01%	0.2%	0.4%	0.4%	1%	.3%
Native Hawaiian & Other Pacific Islander Asian Alone	0.2%	0.5%	0%	0.07%	0.07%	0.03%	.07%	.026%
Asian alone	15%	29%	14%	4%	3%	5%	1%	5%
Two or More Races	2%	0.6%	0.07%	0.9%	0.4%	0.4%	.04%	1%
Hispanic or Latino	49%	65%	82%	68%	89%	79%	89%	78%
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	26%	4%	4%	25%	6%	10%	8%	14%
Some Other Race Alone	0.3%	0.07%	0.03%	0.8%	0.1%	1%	.06%	.7%

Table QFE-4. Rio Hondo College Race and Ethnicity Breakdown 2014-2015 Academic Year to 2019-2020 Academic Year

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
American Indian or Alaskan Native	69 (0.3%)	64 (0.2%)	55 (0.2%)	53 (0.2%)	52 (0.2%)	43 (0.2%)
Asian	2,006 (7.3%)	1,854 (6.8%)	1,861 (7.0%)	1,878 (6.9%)	1,708 (6.2%)	1,658 (6.1%)
Black or African American	543 (2.0%)	520 (1.9%)	437 (1.6%)	482 (1.8%)	453 (1.6%)	409 (1.5%)
Hispanic/Latino	20,561 (74.7%)	20,990 (77.5%)	21,315 (80.5%)	21,864 (80.3%)	22,315 (81.0%)	21,915 (81.0%)
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	44 (0.2%)	34 (0.1%)	28 (0.1%)	38 (0.1%)	33 (0.1%)	39 (0.1%)
Two or More Races	268 (1.0%)	273 (1.0%)	292 (1.1%)	290 (1.1%)	281 (1.0%)	275 (1.0%)
Unknown/Non-Respondent	1,319 (4.8%)	990 (3.7%)	511 (1.9%)	808 (3.0%)	976 (3.5%)	1,087 (4.0%)
White	2,713 (9.9%)	2,351 (8.7%)	1,994 (7.5%)	1,816 (6.7%)	1,720 (6.2%)	1,634 (6.0%)
Grand Total	27,523	27,076	26,493	27,229	27,538	27,060

Note: Excludes Advanced In-Service Training Students
Source: CCCCO MIS Data

Taken together, these realities--slower progress in achieving substantive gains in student performance, program-specific rather than institutional approaches to gains in student achievement, community demographics indicating higher rates of poverty, and the unique status of serving a predominantly Hispanic/Latinx student population--suggest QFE projects that address possible gains in student achievement from an institutional perspective. More specifically, a comprehensive approach to professional development with two foci: excellence in teaching with emphasis on equity-minded practices and the expansion of the implementation of Open Educational Resources (OER) in the classroom.   Through these two projects, the College seeks to build institutional capacity and individual capabilities in the area of teaching excellence and the use of Open Educational Resources (OER).

This section outlines the two Quality Focus Essay projects selected by Rio Hondo College--a thematic, comprehensive approach to professional development focused on excellence in teaching and equity-minded instructional practices and the development, expansion, and implementation of open educational resources (OER) across the curriculum. Both projects are aimed at improving student course completion, persistence across terms, and ultimately completion of degrees and certificates.

QFE Project One – Excellence in Teaching

Rationale

Teaching is the primary responsibility of community college instructors, and the minimum qualification for doing so is usually a master's degree in an academic field. But unlike colleagues in the K through 12 system, instructors in higher education are not required to complete a year-long teacher credentialing program leading to state certification. And although many graduate programs do offer their students teaching experiences, most instructors entering the community college system have little experience or formal training in the theoretical foundations of education; discipline-specific teaching approaches, methods, and strategies; and, most importantly, practical classroom experiences through mentorship.

Concept and Purpose

Rio Hondo College currently has excellent in-place programs addressing several professional development needs such as our Distance Education Certificate for online instruction, Rio Teaching for Learning Institute (RTLI) for part-time faculty, New Faculty Success Seminar for recently hired tenure-track faculty, and a professional development program available to all; however, these programs reach limited audiences. This QFE project would build on the successes of these programs, specifically addressing the transition from subject area expertise to theories and practicalities of classroom teaching. Special emphasis on diverse classroom environments, equity-based practices, culturally relevant pedagogy, enhanced instructor-to-student relationships, and opportunities for mentorship will form the foundation of this enhanced professional development program, which will present an annual program of focused, thematic opportunities for professional enhancement.

Thus, the College will be "capacity building" through commitment to developing and strengthening College resources from within toward the continuing goal of student success through excellence in teaching, thus, actualizing our College mission toward "social justice and equity."

Scope of the Project

This project seeks to build on the existing complement of programs by expanding their reach and developing a fully integrated and systematic institutional infrastructure that supports organizational growth and individual capability on these topics. In order to encourage both full-time and adjunct faculty to embrace this professional development focus on excellence in teaching, several tiers of participation will be offered, with some culminating in certificates of achievement or other incentives as may be devised. In order to accommodate all faculty, professional development opportunities should be available through a variety of modes: face-to-face, online, via Zoom, and through individualized study.

Anticipated Impact on Student Learning and Achievement

Evidence from other studies, specifically those in the area of math, indicate that implementing equity-minded practices in the classroom can result in substantial increases in successful course completion rates that hold true for students across ethnic and gender categories and in subsequent coursework. Previous studies indicate that success rates overall for those instructors fully implementing equity-based instructional strategies can improve by roughly nine percentage points and for some groups of students the improvements are more dramatic. Based upon this previous work, the College anticipates that it will be able to increase its successful course completion rates in the range of five to 10 percentage points for those sections of courses taught by instructors participating in the excellence in teaching project by the end of the project period. This is also expected to translate to increases in the overall successful course completion rates in transfer courses and ultimately will lead to increases in achievement outcomes such as transfer and transfer degree completion.

As well, the College anticipates that implementing equity-minded practices will also result in increases in positivity toward teaching and learning and an overall increase in the students' sense of belonging.

Rio Hondo College
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Project Matrix – Excellence in Teaching

Project Objectives and Performance/Outcome Measures	Responsible Area/Staff	Timeline
Objective 1: Increase student completion		
Outcome Measure 1a: successful completion rates of transfer level math and English courses	**VPAA** **Instructional Deans**	**Fall 2022 – Spring 2026**
Outcome Measure 1b: term to term persistence rates for students identifying transfer as their goal	**VPAA** **Instructional Deans**	**Fall 2022 – Spring 2026**
Outcome Measure 1c: number of ADTs and transfers	**VPAA** **Instructional Deans**	**Spring/Summer 2026**
Activities: Work toward centralized curriculum and shared understanding of equity-focused instructional practices; increase adoption and implementation of these strategies in critical disciplines such as English and math		
Resources: VPAA, Professional Development (PD) Leads (Professional Development Coordinator, RTLI and Aspen Project Coordinators), Instructional Deans, Distance Education team		
Objective 2: Increase implementation of classroom-based, equity-focused instructional practices		
Outcome Measure 2a: number of faculty engaged in professional development for equity-focused teaching strategies	**VPAA** **Instructional Deans** **PD leads**	**Fall 2022- Spring 2026**
Outcome Measure 2b: number of faculty implementing equity-focused teaching strategies	**VPAA** **Instructional Deans** **PD leads**	**Fall 2022- Spring 2026**
Outcome Measure 2c: percentage of faculty knowledgeable about equity-focused teaching **strategies**	**VPAA** **Instructional Deans** **PD leads**	**Fall 2022- Spring 2026**
Activities: continued coordination and expansion of professional development activities for faculty related to equity-focused teaching strategies		
Resources: funding to support faculty participants and coordination of PD activities		
Objective 3: Increase sense of belonging and positive attitudes toward teaching and learning		
Outcome Measure 3a: scaled measurement of sense of belonging	**Instructors**	**Fall 2023- Spring 2026**
Outcome Measure 3b: scaled measurement academic self-efficacy	**Instructors**	**Fall 2023- Spring 2026**
Activities: broad-based implementation of equity-focused teaching strategies, measurement of student perceptions of belonging and academic self-efficacy		
Resources: student surveys with assistance from Institutional Research and Planning		

QFE Project Two – Open Educational Resources

Rationale

Higher education is expensive. Even with the financial assistance of grants and fee waivers, students at Rio Hondo College find their educational costs, specifically the increasing prices of textbooks and supplies, to be a barrier to their success. In fact, the average total for these resources amounts to approximately $2,160 annually for full-time students. As previously mentioned, many Rio Hondo College students struggle financially (see Tables QFE-1 and QFE-2). In the wake of Covid-19, our student population and their families face further financial distress: lost wages, furloughs, and unemployment. These financial burdens, already heavy, are compounded by the absolute necessity and cost for technology and connectivity during periods of remote learning.

Developing, implementing, and expanding the use of Open Educational Resources (OER) can directly alleviate some of the financial stress on students and likely increase successful course completion rates and term-to-term persistence by providing them with free access to the educational opportunities and materials which are vital to their success. Indeed, one of our Rio Hondo College Values specifically states: "Access to education and the opportunity for educational success for all students shall be provided." Instructors adopting OER also have the flexibility to customize content based upon College demographic groups. In addition, broad adoption of OER can have greater impact as faculty work together to produce course-specific, culturally relevant materials, "with particular efforts in regard to those who have been historically and currently underrepresented" (RHC Value).

Concept and Purpose

Rio Hondo College is currently in the development phase of expanding its OER across academic disciplines. This project seeks to extend the use of Open Educational Resources by expanding its development to all academic divisions and by organizing faculty efforts to facilitate transitions to OER.   Further, additional faculty, beyond those working to facilitate transitions, will engage in developing course-specific materials in attempt to increase of the library of available materials across the academic disciplines and instructional divisions of the College. One of the many potential benefits from these endeavors may be a substantial increase in the library of available materials for any one course.

Thus, the College will be "capacity building" in the area of OER through a commitment to developing and strengthening these resources internally toward the goal of improving student course and degree completion, and in the process, actualizing our College mission toward "social justice and equity."

Scope of the Project

This project seeks to build on the nascent efforts in the area of OER by expanding knowledge of available resources and further developing discipline specific resources and strategies to support broad-based implementation of OER across the disciplines. To encourage both full-time and adjunct faculty to engage in use of OER in their courses, professional development opportunities will be developed and made available through a variety of modes: face-to-face, online, via Zoom, and through individualized study.

Keeping in mind the ways in which reducing or eliminating costs associated with commercial textbooks and instructional materials can help bring down barriers to student enrollment, access, and success—and the potential OER have to represent more focused, topical, local, and/or culturally relevant material that aligns with the Rio Hondo's mission and values. Activities will include communicating to current and potential students via the College schedule and the bookstore those course sections that utilize OER, marketing to current and potential students regarding low- or zero-cost programs, and ensuring quality and appropriateness of OER (as is done for commercial textbooks and instructional materials). The College will also seek to increase department-level adoptions and to institutionalize processes by which awareness about and the adoption/creation of OER is encouraged and supported. To these ends, efforts will include selecting OER as a core professional development theme for the campus and offering ongoing, OER-related professional development; training RHC librarians to support faculty in the discovery and/or adoption/creation of OER; implementing OER as a way to support enrollment management; and providing District funds and resources to support OER institutionalization as needed.

While, again, the main or immediate "point" of OER is—as the College Textbook Affordability Act of 2015 (AB 798, Bonilla) has it—"to reduce costs for college students," given the high percentage of RHC students who live at or below the poverty level, the intended impacts of the activities that comprise the OER project are to increase access and the likelihood of success and achievement, by communicating to current and potential students low- or no-cost options to join course sections and programs that utilize OER. Measuring the efficacy of project efforts will perforce include help from the Offices of Institutional Research and Planning with information provided by Instructional Operations (i.e. Scheduling), counselors, student surveys, and focus groups.

Anticipated Impact on Student Learning and Achievement

The College expects that increasing the number of course sections and programs that utilize OER—and increasing potential and current student awareness about what OER is and which sections and programs utilize low- and no-cost OER—will increase enrollment, retention, and completion of those low-income students for whom instructional materials are cost prohibitive. This project is intended to increase successful course completion in those courses where OER are implemented. As well, the College expects that term-to-term persistence of students will increase as more OER are implemented. Increased implementation is also expected to translate to increases in the overall successful course completion rates and ultimately will lead to increases in achievement outcomes such as transfer and transfer degree completion.

Rio Hondo College
Accreditation 2022 – Quality Focus Essay
Project Matrix – Open Educational Resources

Project Objectives and Performance/Outcome Measures	Responsible Area/Staff	Timeline
Objective 1: Institutionalize OER		
Outcome Measure 1a: # of PD activities offered and participants	• **Staff Development Committee**	**Fall 2021, Spring 2022**
Outcome Measure 1b: Incorporation in enrollment management plan	• **Curriculum Committee** • **VPAA**	**Fall 2022**
Activities: Select OER as a core professional development theme for the campus; Implement OER as a way to support enrollment management; Provide budget and resources to support OER institutionalization as needed.		
Resources: CCC (state-level) PD offerings; RHC Staff Development Committee; Curriculum Committee, Enrollment Management Task Force.		
Objective 2: Increase Department-Level Adoptions		
Outcome Measure 2a: # of faculty engaged with developing and using OER materials	• **Faculty**	**Fall 2023 – Spring 2024**
Outcome Measure 2b: # of CRNs with OER materials	• **Faculty**	**Fall 2023 – Spring 2024**
Outcome Measure 2c: # of program plans, reviews, and unit plans identifying OER as a goal	• **Faculty** • **Deans**	**Fall 2023 – Spring 2024**
Activities: Offer ongoing professional development in OER (equity benefits, discovery, and adoption of materials); Train librarians to support faculty with OER; Senate resolution to support faculty use of OER.		
Resources: RTLI; RHC Library; Cal-OER; Vision Resource Center; Curriculum Committee; RHC Staff Development Committee.		
Objective 3: Increase Student Access and Success		
Outcome Measure 3a: % of students enrolling and completing OER sections	• **Scheduling Office** • **Counselors**	**Fall 2022**
Outcome Measure 3b: Decrease overall cost to students to complete a course or program	• **IRP Office** • **Bookstore**	**Fall 2021 – Fall 2024**
Outcome Measure 3c: Quality OER materials that support the course and/or program outcomes	• **Faculty**	**Fall 2022**
Activities: Clearly communicate OER sections to students (i.e., via the schedule and at the bookstore); Ensure quality and appropriateness of OER materials as is done for commercial textbooks; Marketing and outreach to students for low- or zero-cost programs.		
Resources: Bookstore; Instructional Operations (Scheduling) Office; Curriculum Committee; Marketing/Communications		