

# Rio Hondo's Digital Badge Program Helps Students Refine Job Seeking Skills

As a counselor, Vanessa Chavez spends a lot of time thinking about how students can be as polished as possible to ultimately land the job or internship they want. Thanks to her hard work and leadership, high school and community college students can learn critical skills and earn digital credentials to display on their LinkedIn profiles or other online portfolios.

Chavez is a counselor in the Business Division at Rio Hondo College (RHC), where she's responsible for things like educational planning, graduation criteria, and career placement. She attended one of the college's employer advisory board meetings and learned about gaps organizations see when interviewing students for jobs and internships.

"I'm always thinking about how we can make our students as polished as possible when we make the handoff to employers," Chavez said. "How can we make sure that they have a certificate or associate's degree, but also have soft skills like how to be ready for an interview?"

Chavez attended a demo from NexusEdge, an online learning provider. She saw digital badges as an opportunity to give students the skills they needed in an on-demand format.

At the same time, the LA Regional Directors of Employer Engagement for the Business & Entrepreneurship, Advanced Transportation and Logistics, and Global Trade Sectors were meeting with Gita Runkle, Dean of Business at RHC. They shared with her a new, digital platform they developed called ProvenReady.

ProvenReady was created in partnership with NexusEdge and is designed to connect LA high school students to robust college and career pathway resources. It utilizes the same industry-created digital badging library as Nexus Edge. This timely discussion helped press the development of Rio Hondo's new career-readiness badging series.

Through collaborative efforts, Chavez created the content for seven career readiness modules in fall 2019 and worked with NexusEdge founder and CEO Eddie Lin to put them onto the platform. The modules cover:

- Interview skills
- Resume creation
- Informational interviews
- Professional associations
- Cover letter creation
- Networking
- Workplace etiquette

Chavez was mindful to keep the modules "short and sweet" to encourage completion and worked with Dean Runkle on choosing and editing content.

"These are good topics that any student should know," Chavez said. "This stuff is not rocket science, just packaging it in a way students want to read and learn about it."

After completing each module, students take a quiz to earn a digital badge, a microcredential they can add to their LinkedIn profile, portfolio, signature line, and/or website.

About 50 students had completed at least one module as of summer 2020, and 15 students completed all seven. Chavez recognized those students who completed all the modules by calling to congratulate them and creating sashes that they could wear during virtual commencement ceremonies in the spring.

Erick Pineda completed all of the modules before graduating from RHC and was proud to wear his sash. He completed the badges to boost his resume as he prepares to enter the business world. “The modules help students know what businesses are going to be looking for, and what questions to expect in an interview,” he said. “The badges will help me be professional when entering the field.”

Paying attention and staying on track by following along will help students pursuing the badges for themselves. “I would 100% recommend the badge program to other students,” Pineda said.

Chavez’s promotional efforts for the program were cut short because of COVID-19, but she’s in the process of uploading the modules to Canvas so faculty can use them as part of remote learning this fall.

The modules is also incorporated in the digital badge initiative at ProvenReady. In fact, analytics show many high school students who had access to the badges through ProvenReady, also engaged with Rio Hondo’s career-readiness badge series, serving as another way to connect Los Angeles high school students to the community college system.

While the content covers skills that might also be part of a college’s career center, Chavez is quick to point out that they should not be seen as substitutes for working with a career counselor — something she emphasizes in the modules themselves and in her conversations with students. She sees the modules as the first step on the journey toward job placement and a way to encourage students to work with their school’s career center.

“Some of our students don’t have social capital and you really need to push them to do these things,” Chavez said. “Students want to do everything online and this is a way to meet them where they are.”

*Attached photo: Erick Pineda, Rio Hondo College, pictured wearing Career Readiness Sash as he celebrates graduation.*

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For more information, please visit the following:

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