

PRESIDENT'S UPDATE

COVERING MAY 2016



President's Message



Teresa Dreyfuss

We concluded our 2015-16 academic year with another series of big wins, making this a banner year on many fronts.

At the start of May, Rio Hondo College broke ground on our third regional campus, this one in Pico Rivera. We are partnering with El Rancho Unified School District to give community members access to higher educational options just across the street from El Rancho High School.

We also held our annual Collaborative Crisis Scenario, a one-of-a-kind drill that lets students in nursing, firefighting, journalism

and emergency medical technician training apply classroom skills to a real-life crisis. Performing arts students play roles within the scenario, extending the benefits to yet another element of our campus community.

At the month's end, we celebrated graduations for a record number of

students, representing a major increase in the number of degrees for transfer. These degrees guarantee admission to a California State University campus, helping to ensure our students can embark on the next step of their higher educational journey.

We also congratulated the first class of graduates from our innovative Pathway to Law School program. Available at only 29 community college campuses, the program offers training and guidance to students who wish to become lawyers. Our first cohort of graduates numbered 14, but the program's popularity already has swelled enrollment past 40.

End-of-the-year honors included two for current and former faculty. English Professor Marie Eckstrom received this year's Distinguished Faculty Award. Emeritus professor Maurice Meysenburg was honored during Commencement as a Fellow of the College for his contributions.

Taken all together, the events exemplify Rio Hondo College's commitment to its community, the extraordinary nature of our dedicated faculty and the success of our hard-working students.

Record-Breaking 1,372 Graduates Earn 1,646 Degrees in 2015-16

Nearly 1,400 students received degrees during Rio Hondo College's 53rd Commencement Ceremonies on May 26, representing a graduating class whose impressive numbers of degrees for transfer helped it break previous College achievement records.

The ceremony featured a keynote address from Dunia Elvir, anchor for *Noticiero Telemundo 52's* 5 a.m. and 6 a.m. broadcasts. Elvir received a Golden Mike for investigative reporting, an Emmy Award and a GLAAD Media Award. She has been named one of the 13 most outstanding Latinos in the U.S. by the National Association of Latino Leaders.

Elvir urged students not to merely follow their dreams, but to vigorously chase them, even harass them, until they become reality. That level of determination brought her to America from Honduras, from cleaning toilets in Watts to becoming a television news anchor.

William Ashby, the president of the Associated Students of Rio Hondo College, told students about his journey to Rio Hondo. Ashby, a returning student, was a foster child and high school dropout who decided to pursue a college degree after the birth of his son. He will continue his education at Cal State Fullerton. **Continued on page 2**



RIO IN THE NEWS! Click here to read more about Rio Hondo College's commencement in *The Whittier Daily News*.

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Valedictorian Maritza J. Acuña Gaxiola received the Marie I. Pellissier Award. Gaxiola also has been recognized along with her twin sister, Janeth, for leading the Rio Hondo College women's soccer team to the state finals. Both have transferred to UC Irvine to study medicine.



Four students were also honored for overcoming adversity en route to earning their degrees as "Profiles of Student Success." (See page 5)

In all, 633 students this year earned associate degrees for transfer. These degrees, which guarantee admission to Cal State University campuses, more than doubled in 2015-16 from 298 in 2014-15.

They represent 40 percent of the 1,646 degrees earned this year by 1,372 Rio Hondo College students, a figure that also represents a huge leap over 2014-15 numbers and reflects a six-year trend of growing student achievement.

The May 26 commencement ceremony honored 14 students graduating as part of the first Pathway to Law School cohort. The students completed

additional classes, engaged in special programs and secured internships to prepare for further legal education and careers in law.

Emeritus professor of economics and sociology Maurice Meysenburg was named a Fellow of the College for his contributions over the years.

Although students in Rio Hondo College's Fire Academy and Police Academy graduated in their own

ceremonies earlier this year, the May 26 program included 180 students earning associate degrees in public safety fields as well as students from the College's well-regarded nursing program.

Some 75 students received associate degrees in nursing, including 26 who will transition into jobs at Whittier Hospital and Anaheim Regional Medical Center. Eleven students received associate degrees in vocational nursing and 19 will earn vocational nursing certificates. Seventy students received certificates in nursing assistant programs, including acute care.



Board Report

Rio Hondo College's Board of Trustees honored Marie Eckstrom with its 2016 Distinguished Faculty Award, recognizing her for more than 15 years of contributions as a teacher and faculty leader and for helping to strengthen her department.

The award honors faculty members who consistently demonstrate excellence in and outstanding dedication to teaching, their discipline and to the college, said Faculty Association President Robert Bethel, who presented the award.

"I can think of no one who is more deserving of this award or embodies better that ideal than Marie Eckstrom," Bethel said. "I am very, very proud to give this award."

Eckstrom teaches an array of English courses, helps coordinate the Writes of Spring arts and literature festival and the River's Voice literary anthology, and leads study abroad programs in English. She has also served as secretary, vice president and president of the Academic Senate and helped to strengthen the rigor of departmental program review, Bethel said.



Eckstrom recounted her career path, starting as a French language and literature teacher under the supervision of nuns at a Catholic high school.

"They taught me dedication to my job," she said. "They expected a lot out of all their teachers. And I think that's where I really learned to love my job and love teaching."

Eckstrom next taught for 10 years at Los Angeles Unified high schools and middle schools before returning to college for degrees in English and other subjects, and launching her career as a college instructor.

Board of Trustees members also honored retiring math/sciences instructor Firouz Mosharrarf and Administration of Justice instructor Robert Feliciano, and Career and Re-Entry Services classified employee Liz Chavez.

The Board recognized five students who won Live Your Dream Awards from the Whittier chapter of Soroptimist International, and reviewed a video lauding the contributions of the Information Technology staff.

Advocates of the Puente Hills Landfill Park project presented an outline of a proposed master plan for converting 142 acres of the former landfill bordering Rio Hondo College into a regional park over the next 75 years. The 1,365-acre landfill was the nation's largest and deepest.



Faculty Commitment Honored at End of Year Luncheon

Rio Hondo College Faculty Association (RHCFA) President Sergio Guzman thanked the group's members for their unwavering commitment to student success on May 19 during the Faculty End of the Year Luncheon. All staff were invited to the event, held at the Child Development Center and hosted by RHCFA and the President's Office.

Guzman lauded the group's close working relationship with Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss and her administrative team, and thanked the Board of Trustees for its support.

The event carried the theme "Diversity of Rio." President Dreyfuss also offered remarks.



First Students Graduate from Pathway to Law School Program

Katherine Torres began dreaming of becoming a lawyer when, at the age of 10, she accompanied a friend and her mother to court. A family friend sparked Devon Castorena's dream of practicing environmental law. But, as community college students, neither saw a way to pursue those dreams until Rio Hondo College launched its Pathway to Law School program in fall 2014.



This spring, Torres and Castorena were among 14 students in the two-year program's first graduating class, ready to begin the second stage of their journeys from community college to law school.

"It was a great advantage," said Torres, 24, who will transfer to Cal Poly Pomona to study psychology and criminology. "I only needed a few more classes to complete my degree, but once I realized how much this program had to offer, I actually lengthened my time at Rio Hondo to take the law school classes."

The program includes nine classes, activities and internships to expand students' understanding of the skills and education they will need for law school. The State Bar Council on Access and Fairness sponsors the program at 29 community colleges to help under-represented minorities and first-time college students attend law school. Six top California law schools are partners.

Castorena, 21, the eldest of three children, said the internship solidified his understanding of what it would be like to be a lawyer.

"That internship really set in stone that I knew I wanted to be lawyer," said Castorena, who will study history at UCLA this fall. "It was eye opening. The internship showed me what happens behind the scenes of a law firm. It's not just courtroom debating. You have the paperwork and you're meeting clients, handling mediations. I really enjoyed it. Now, I know I can be a lawyer. I know I can do this work."

Torres, the eldest of five children and the daughter of immigrants, said she was inspired to go into immigration law by her internship, where she helped low-income residents in Compton.

"I was helping these people who were people like me – if we weren't there to legally assist them, they wouldn't be able to go any further when it came to family law, expungements and small claims," said Torres, who is fluent in Spanish.

Torres praised two courses that are at the center of the program – a speech and argument class and a law and democracy class taught by a lawyer. Together, the courses taught students how the legal system functions, how to write legal briefs and how to argue a case before a judge.

Castorena said a counseling class taught by program coordinator Rudy Santacruz helped him figure out his strengths – that he listens well, is adept at analysis and has a strong memory for detail.



As the eldest children of single parents, the two students juggle family responsibilities, multiple jobs and their classes. They said the program helped inspire them improve academically.

"Being a first-generation college student has been difficult," Torres said. "The Pathway to Law School program helped me focus my efforts. If you want to be a lawyer, you have to plan for college, law school applications, every step. The Pathway classes are so rich with information, and we are all so motivated, that you take every bit of information in. It was so easy to keep us intrigued."

Rio Hondo College's program enrolled 20 students in its first cohort. Of those, 14 will attend private and public universities that range from UCLA and UC Berkeley to University of La Verne and Cal Poly Pomona. Others are continuing in the program, joined this year by 41 new participants. Campus officials expect numbers to grow again in 2016-17.

Pathway to Law School Class of 2016

- 1. Almanza, Joanna:**
University of La Verne, Photography
- 2. Alvarez, Michael:**
UC San Diego, Economics
- 3. Arroyo, Michelle:**
Cal Poly Pomona, Philosophy
- 4. Castorena, Devon:**
UCLA, History
- 5. De Leon, Melissa:**
CSULA, Communications
- 6. Del Real, Fernando:**
San Francisco State, International Business
- 7. Diaz, Paula:**
UC Berkeley, Sociology
- 8. Escamilla, Diana:**
Cal Poly Pomona, Sociology
- 9. Hernández, Jose:** CSU Dominguez Hills,
Administration of Justice
- 10. Limatu, Julissa:**
UC San Diego, Political Science
- 11. Meza, Adrian:**
Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, Political Science
- 12. Nuon, Steven:**
UC Riverside, Political Science
- 13. Torres, Katherine:**
Cal Poly Pomona, Psychology
- 14. Valencia, Shelsye:**
Cal Poly Pomona, Political Science

Students Overcome Hurdles to Secure Degrees

Rio Hondo College honored four graduates at its 53rd Commencement for demonstrating extraordinary tenacity in obtaining their degrees, including two who are pursuing careers in high-demand medical fields and two who refused to let health challenges keep them from success.



Thanh Luong

Thanh Luong, who started at Rio Hondo College in 2013, arrived in the U.S. six years ago. Inspired by her grandmother's use of herbal remedies in her Vietnamese village, she decided to become a doctor – even though she knew little of the sciences involved and no English.

Luong joined the Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement (MESA) and TRiO Student Support Services science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) programs, spending more than 200 hours in peer-facilitated supplementary instruction programs. She also volunteered at the UCLA Medical Center Care Extenders Internship Program.

Along the way, she learned English and achieved a 4.0 GPA. Accepted at multiple UC campuses, she will transfer to UC San Diego in the fall.



Daniel Bresenden

Daniel Bresenden, a Russian immigrant, returned to school after a career as a general contractor. In 2008, the Great Recession sapped his business' health. Two years later, his brother died from a brain tumor.

Frustrated, intellectually unfulfilled and exhausted, Bresenden turned back to education. He decided to launch a new career in medical research to help people like his brother. He completed genomics research at UC Irvine and dedicated himself to earning a trio of associate's degrees in mathematics and science, biology and physics. He will transfer to UC Berkeley in the fall.



Stephanie Lopez

Stephanie Lopez was told her battles with depression and anxiety would rule out achieving a college degree. That inspired her to work even harder, to show people that mental health challenges don't need to derail someone's ambitions.

Lopez chose Rio Hondo College as the first step in this journey, thinking at one point that she would flit in and out of the College. Instead, she found herself shaped by teachers and relationships that opened her horizons to new career possibilities and helped her understand her own challenges better.

Lopez decided to pursue communications, becoming a leader in campus clubs and winning awards for videography and for speech and debate. She ended up not earning just one associate's degree, but three: one each in behavioral studies, communications and journalism. She will study rhetoric and journalism at UC Berkeley next year.



Tron Bosse

Marine Staff Sgt. Tron Bosse overcame battlefield challenges during two tours of combat duty and showed leadership in posts in Africa and Japan. Today, he is battling third-stage colon cancer with the same intensity – not letting the challenge keep

him from earning associate's degrees in history and political science.

Bosse will transfer to Hofstra University in New York with a triple major in political science, Latin American/Caribbean studies and history.

College Breaks Ground for Pico Rivera Educational Center

Rio Hondo College celebrated a groundbreaking ceremony on May 4 for its Pico Rivera Educational Center, a park-like regional campus that will provide area residents with a convenient venue for taking college courses in state-of-the-art classrooms starting this fall.

The center, at 9426 Marjorie St., Pico Rivera, was created through a partnership between Rio Hondo College and the El Rancho Unified School District. It will be the third regional campus developed by Rio Hondo College since 2010.

"We are thrilled to be providing this new resource to our Pico Rivera community," said Rio Hondo College Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss. "Our growing network of regional campuses is bringing the promise of higher education to the neighborhoods where our students live and work."

The project is renovating seven buildings spanning 6,720 square feet to create a collegiate identity and integrate 21st century learning tools into six classrooms and an office. The center will include a computer lab, a student study room, a teacher/staff lounge, counseling and assessment offices, a shaded quad, a new restroom building and 1.3 acres of parking. It will accommodate about 280 students.

RIO IN THE NEWS! Click here to read more about the Pico Rivera Educational Center in *The Whittier Daily News*.



Public Safety, Nursing and Journalism Students Respond to Active Shooter Crisis Drill

Dozens of Rio Hondo College students in training to become nurses, emergency medical technicians, firefighters and journalists responded to an active-shooter and car crash drill on May 13 as part of the fourth annual Collaborative Crisis Scenario.

Students worked with members of the Huntington Park Police Department and college instructors to extract six “injured” people from a van, which crashed after the staged shooting, performed emergency treatment to their injuries, and transported them to a makeshift hospital, where nurses took over.

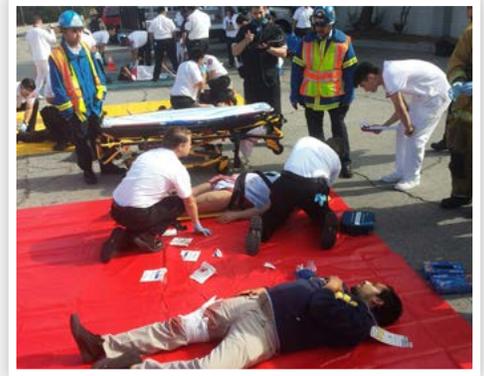
The scenario, staged once at 8 a.m. and again at 1 p.m., engaged 19 emergency medical technician students, 10 Rio Hondo College Fire Academy cadets, about 18 nursing students, three student journalists, four professional EMTs from Care Ambulance Service and 14 representatives of the Huntington Park Police Department.

In addition, seven students from Rio Hondo College’s performing arts program played parts in the scenario, including those of the six injured individuals.

The event – the largest to date – was staged at the Rio Hondo College Administration of Justice Annex with the College’s L Tower serving as “Roadrunner Hospital.”

“It’s an incredibly dramatic program that pushes our students to apply the academic skills they acquire in our classrooms to a real-life scenario,” Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss said. “It’s a complex exercise with dozens of moving parts.”

Just as important as the drill, students took part in a debriefing period, analyzing their reactions, communication and delegation to discover ways to improve before they join the front lines in a real emergency.



RIO IN THE NEWS! [Click here to read more about Rio Hondo College's Crisis Drill in *The Whittier Daily News*.](#)

Save The Date



6 p.m. Wednesday, July 13:

Board of Trustees Meeting, Rio Hondo College

Through Sunday, July 31:

Student Art Show, Rio Hondo Art Gallery

Connect with Us on Social Media



RHCRoadrunners



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RioHondoCollege



#iLoveRioHondo



bit.do/riohondocollege

Serving the communities of

- El Monte
- Santa Fe Springs
- South El Monte
- Whittier
- Pico Rivera

and portions of:

- Norwalk
- East Whittier*
- Downey
- South Whittier*
- La Mirada
- West Whittier*
- City of Industry
- Avocado Heights*
- Los Nietos*

*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 degrees, certificates, transfer, career and technical pathways, basic skills proficiency, and lifelong learning.

College Observatory Announces Summer Star Viewing Dates

Rio Hondo College's Gordon D. Crowell Astrophysical Observatory will hold free, public viewing nights this summer at 8 p.m. Fridays, June 25, July 1 and 22 and Aug. 5 and 12.

The observatory is home to one of the largest telescopes available to the public throughout Southern California. Guests should arrive 15 to 20 minutes early. Park in Lot C in front of the Child Development Center. The walk to the observatory is about half a mile uphill. Flashlights are not required. Viewing is contingent on clear weather. For information, call 562-692-0921, ext. 3742.

Rio Hondo College Celebrates Student Success

Rio Hondo College celebrated student success with two additional events this spring: the Outstanding Student Awards on May 6 and the eighth annual Student Success Celebration on May 20.

At the first event, 53 students received certificates and awards of \$100 for their accomplishments. Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss provided opening remarks, Interim Vice President of Academic Affairs JoAnna Schilling spoke and deans and directors presented awards to students. The event was hosted by the Office of Academic Affairs and Alpha Gamma Sigma honor society.



The second event, themed "Celebrating Our Shining Stars," honored students for their acceptance to four year universities or for graduating with associate of arts, associate of science, associate of arts for transfer and associate of science for transfer degrees or certificates

President Dreyfuss told students how proud Rio Hondo College's team of educators is about their accomplishments, especially considering how many of them juggled work, family obligations as well as classwork.

She thanked the students' family members and friends for their support, as well as Rio Hondo College's Student Services and the other College programs who made a difference in these students' lives. The event was a collaboration among various Student Services programs and departments. It included a reception with entertainment provided by the California High School Jazz Band.

