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## College Pushes for Student Success



*Teresa Dreyfuss*

Happy 2014, and welcome back to a brand new semester at Rio Hondo College.

This time last year, we were gearing up to celebrate 50 years of quality education here at the College. While taking a stroll down memory lane was a wonderful experience, I am definitely looking forward to the next 50 years and beyond.

As Superintendent/President, I want to ensure that our students are poised to succeed in their studies and in their future endeavors. As you'll read in this update, we have a lot to celebrate and we are taking major strides in the area of Student Success.

On Jan. 18, the College held FLEX Day with its continued theme of "Understanding the Student Experience: Exploring Key Factors in Student Success." The morning featured a panel of six students. We touched on the Student Success Initiative as well as accreditation and the budget.

For instance, our new Freshman Success Center is in full swing and after only one semester it has helped more than 1,000 new students with a variety of services. We were also proud to, once again, send some of our best and brightest to help with the Colby Fire. On Jan. 18, recent graduates of the Rio Hondo Wildland Fire Academy were deployed to help battle the devastating blaze in Glendora.

The College is also very pleased to bring to campus "Transitway," a monthlong art exhibit that will feature the art work of four Los Angeles-based artists whose work has been commissioned for the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) El Monte Station. The exhibit is made possible by the partnership between the College and Metro.

In the coming months the College has many more events and opportunities that are geared toward Student Success. It is my hope that we all take these opportunities to continue to build a culture of success on our campus.

## Fire Academy Dispatched to Colby Fire

Seventeen members of the Rio Hondo College Wildland Fire Academy were deployed on Jan. 18 to help battle the Colby Fire, which broke out in the foothills north of Azusa and Glendora two days beforehand. Before their deployment, the blaze had burned about 2,000 acres, destroyed five homes and 11 other structures, and caused damage to at least six other structures. Our recent graduates were able to assist in containing the fire while utilizing their academy training. The crew spent 13 days battling the fire and returned Jan. 31.



## Board Update

At the regular meeting of the Rio Hondo College Board of Trustees on Jan. 15, retirees Raymundo Esquivel and Marian Lassiter were honored with a commendation for their collective 72 years of service to the College.

Esquivel, who started at the College as a librarian and later taught math and Spanish, worked for the College for more than 38 years; Lassiter, senior financial aid assistant, worked in several capacities for 34 years.

The Board also received a thorough update from the Public Safety Division, which is entering its 50th year of service. Dean of Public Safety Ygnacio "Nash" Flores and Associate Dean Don Mason outlined the division's progress and projects on the horizon, including an exciting program that trained SWAT, medical, fire and law enforcement together.

Flores said that the Public Safety Division graduates the most students at the College, and is currently ranked the No. 1 community college in the state in presenting protective services and homeland security degrees.

In the future, the Division will expand degrees and certifications in corrections and possibly develop a volunteer firefighter program.

After approving items on the brief Board agenda, the Trustees heard presentations about the building program, accreditation, faculty association, classified employees, student services and more.

Del Terra Assistant Program Manager Jerome Quemada said plans for the renovated soccer field are in the hands of the state architect. After the plans are approved they will go out to bid. Also in the planning stages are the new bookstore and print shop; a flag pole and veterans memorial; and the "Rio Plaza," which is slated to be built at the bottom of the hill near the College's entrance and will feature bike racks and a bus stop with shelter.

Vice President of Academic Affairs Dr. Kenn Pierson informed the Board that the College's ninth Associate Degree for Transfer in art history was approved by the California Community College Chancellor's Office. Dr. Pierson also said that the Rio Hondo College Art Gallery will be home of the Transitway art show from Feb. 3-28.

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## Student Success Focus of FLEX Day



On Jan. 24, we hosted the first-ever student panel on FLEX Day, continuing with the fall theme of "Understanding the Student Experience: Exploring Key Factors in Student Success." Staff Development/FLEX Coordinator Katie O'Brien and her staff did a fantastic job organizing this educational and enriching day for faculty and staff. Also in attendance were Trustees Mary Ann Pacheco and Gary Mendez who were given a warm welcome from the standing room-only audience in the Wray Theater. Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss gave an update on the Student Success Initiative, accreditation and the budget. Academic Senate President Dr. Adam Wetsman, RHCFA President Kathy Pudelko and 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President of CSEA Lisa Sandoval also gave campus updates.

Dr. Kenn Pierson gave a presentation on the Accreditation Self Evaluation process and timeline, and encouraged all to participate between now and September, before the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) Team visit. Dr. James Sass presented the results of the RP Group study on how community colleges can best support Student Success. The key highlights were that students need to feel: 1) Directed, 2) Focused, 3) Nurtured, 4) Engaged, 5) Connected and 6) Valued by their community college faculty and staff. These six success factors set the foundation for the subsequent student panel session, "In Their Own Voice: Rio Hondo College Student Panel." The seven student panelists passionately talked about their student journey and future goals; their interaction and connection to Rio Hondo thanks to the faculty and staff who cared and helped guide their educational and career paths; and, challenges and solutions, including specific tips for faculty.

After the morning session, more than 15 breakout sessions were offered ranging from Student Success, Veterans Service, Cybercrime and Finance Budget 101. President Dreyfuss gave the workshop on Finance Budget 101 to provide a better understanding on how the budget process works, the timeline and how the budget relates to FTES. Specifically, the FTES the college needs to reach this year and next year. She explained the "Fifty Percent Law" and CCFS-311. FLEX Day ended with division meetings.

## 'Transitway' Art Exhibit to Showcase Through February

Working in conjunction with the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro), Rio Hondo College is hosting "Transitway," an exhibition featuring the work of four Los Angeles-based artists in February.

The artists, who were commissioned for the Metro El Monte Station, will showcase new and original works of art from Feb. 3-28 in the RHC Art Gallery.

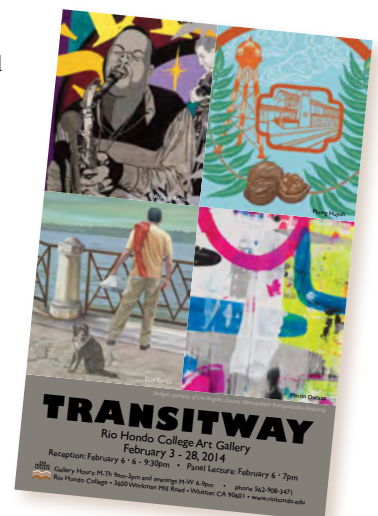
"The El Monte Station is the largest bus facility west of Chicago, so thousands of people are exposed to this wonderful art on a daily basis," said RHC Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss. "The College is excited to showcase this artwork to our students, many of whom live in the City of El Monte and commute to our campus every day."

The four artists whose work will be displayed include Vincent Ramos, Eloy Torrez, Martin Durazo and Phung Huynh.

Ramos' work pays homage to the rich cultural contribution of the El Monte Legion Stadium, a hotbed of activity in its heyday; Torrez explores transitions and movement, energy and patterns that people create on their travels; Durazo uses swirling vibrant colors to energetically mirror the ever-changing intersection of cultures and environments in the Los Angeles area; and Huynh's artwork is informed by the city of El Monte's vibrant transformations through the use of symbolic and metaphoric imagery.

The gallery is open Monday through Thursday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.; Monday through Wednesday from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. Admission is free to the public; however, there is a \$3 parking fee.

**Rio in the News:** Click here to read more about the Transitway exhibit in the "Whittier Daily News."



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Also, 32 students attended the College's Springboard program, which is the spring equivalent of Summer Bridge – a specialized program that helps students prepare for college-level work through rigorous math and English refresher courses along with other resources.

Associated Students of Rio Hondo College President Valeria Guerrero said the student leaders are in the process of creating a mission statement and that during the beginning of the semester they will run an Info Center at the Student Union to provide students with maps, snacks and water.

## Freshman Success Center Offers Helping Hand

As students at Rio Hondo College geared up for the first day of the spring semester on Jan. 25, new and returning freshmen found a new resource to help them through the sometimes complex world of higher education.

The Freshman Success Center, which opened in fall 2013, offers first-time college students resources to help them thrive in their first year, which is crucial in a student's overall academic success. Such services include counseling and help with registration and financial aid.

Studies show that students who do well during their first year in college are more likely to receive their degrees and transfer. "We want to ensure every student who attends Rio Hondo College has all the resources they need," said Acting Dean of Counseling and Student Success Dr. Mike Muñoz. "The Freshman Success Center is a new tool we are utilizing to fulfill our goals within the Student Success Initiative."

The Student Success Initiative was borne from the Student Success Act of 2012, which funds community college services like orientation, assessment, counseling and advising. In early January, Gov. Jerry Brown released his proposed 2014-15 budget showing an 11.4 percent increase in funding for community colleges with a special emphasis on Student Success.

RHC plans to implement the Student Success Initiative that includes focusing on transfer and workforce preparation; responding to student needs and the economy; and increasing Student Success rates for certificate and degree completion, as well as transfer to four-year institutions.

**Rio in the News:** Click here to read more about the Freshman Success Center in the 'Community College Daily' under Academic Programs!

"Unfortunately, recent high school graduates have lower persistence, graduation and transfer rates than any of our students, yet they are the largest group of students at Rio Hondo College," said Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss. "By focusing resources toward their needs, we will have a better chance to increase their success, thus increasing the success of the College as a whole."

The Center is designed to manage a cohort of roughly 1,800 students and ensure they declare a program of study and develop an educational plan during their first year. Other services offered by the Center include Freshmen Welcome Days and Freshman Success Seminars.

Staff is available at the Center to assist students develop an educational plan and help with the AccessRio portal, which is the College's information system that students use to access registration, campus email, library resources and more.

The Freshman Success Center is open from Monday-Thursday 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., and Friday 8 a.m. to noon and is located in the Student Services building, room SS350.



### Did you know?

**3,657 Rio Hondo College students received \$2,689,805.36 in Financial Aid reimbursements from Federal Pell Grants and Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (FSEOG) on Jan. 31**

## College Hosts 'Wake Up Whittier'

On Jan. 15, Rio Hondo College (RHC) hosted the Whittier Chamber's "Wake Up Whittier" networking and breakfast event at the Río Café. On behalf of the Rio Hondo College, Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss welcomed more than 200 Chamber members, prospective members, and community leaders during her opening remarks at the 100th Anniversary kick-off celebration for the Chamber. President Dreyfuss accepted a certificate of appreciation on behalf of the College.

Executive Director of the RHC Foundation Howard Kummerman gave a Foundation update and promoted the upcoming "Taste of Rio" that is the main fundraiser event this year to benefit student scholarships. Coordinator of the Career Development Center Belen Torres-Gill gave a Career Center update and announced the "College Board," a campus job postings resource for students to search for employment opportunities.

Carol Crosby, the executive director of the Whittier Chamber, recognized the four "oldest members" of the Chamber: White Emerson Mortuary, Popular Community Bank, The Whittier Daily News, and Law Firm of Bewley Lassleben and Miller. Councilman Joe Vinatieri gave a moving address, which included a city council update.



Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss and Whittier Chamber of Commerce Board President Bonnie Watje at the annual 'Wake Up Whittier' breakfast.



## Dates to Remember

### Transitway Art Exhibition

Open during the month of February  
Monday-Thursday 9 a.m.-3 p.m. (Days)  
Monday-Wednesday 6-9 p.m. (Evenings)  
Rio Hondo Art Gallery

### Police Academy Information Meetings

Every first Wednesday of the month at 9 a.m.  
Every second, third and fourth Wednesday of the month at 7 p.m.  
Administration of Justice Building, Room AJ202  
Parking \$3

### Fourth Annual Forensics Showcase: Beyond De'Bate Cave

Thursday, March 6 from 7-9 p.m.  
Wray Theater  
\$5 suggested Donation

### Taste of Rio: Restaurant, Wine Tasting, Auction and Drawing

Friday, May 2  
6 p.m.  
Mid-Quad  
[www.riohondo.edu/foundation](http://www.riohondo.edu/foundation)

### Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA)

Feb. 7-April 11, Fridays only (except Feb. 14 and March 28)  
9:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.  
Business building B118

### Writes of Spring

April 23-24  
Wray Theater

### Regional High School Counselor Breakfast

Friday, Feb. 21  
8-11 a.m.  
Rio Café

## Dedication Adds Up to Success for Professor



It's no secret the MESA/TRiO Student Support Services (SSS) STEM Program is one of the top programs at Rio Hondo College. But did you know it was one of the best in the country?

In October, the program was honored as one of America's top programs that increase academic opportunities and increase achievement for Latino students. On hand to receive the honor was Dr. Gisela Spieler-Persad, director for the Math Engineering Science Achievement (MESA) Program.

Spieler-Persad has been a dedicated faculty member at the College since 1997, teaching various math courses. She came to the United States from Germany in 1983 and earned a Master of Science degree in applied math, a Master of Arts degree in pure math and a doctorate in applied math from the University of Southern California.

Spieler-Persad brought her talents to RHC, after working for eight years at California State University, Fullerton.

"Each student is unique and has so much potential," Spieler-Persad said. "Sometimes, though, that gets buried under all kinds of stuff. I make their goal my goal and then I support them to achieve their dream."

In addition to directing the MESA/TRiO SSS STEM Program, Spieler-Persad teaches MATH 049, which shows Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) students how to succeed in this challenging major.

"When students sign up for my program, I become their ally and they become my mission," she said.

For many, studying for STEM subjects may seem like a daunting task, but Spieler-Persad said the key to success is dedication and learning not to take on too much at one time.

"It starts with the amount of time you are studying: one hour for each hour in class, so a four-unit class needs at least 12 hours outside of class," she said. "Simply doing homework is not enough. Read the book before class, try some problems, always go to class, ask questions, review, do more problems, read the book again, visit the professor during office hours and don't quit until you get it."

Spieler-Persad also encourages students not to take too many units when taking STEM courses and to study from class to class, not from test to test. Getting a study buddy is also very helpful.

## College Rings in Chinese New Year

**Rio in the News:** Click here to read more about Rio's Chinese New Year celebration in the Los Angeles Times.

About 100 students, faculty and staff experienced the sights, color and movement of the award-winning Taiwan Le-Yun Dance Group on Jan. 29, as they performed at the first-ever Rio Hondo College Chinese New Year Celebration in the Mid Quad area.

The dance group from Taiwan performed six traditional Chinese folk dances to introduce Chinese culture to the College community, which included: Beautiful Orchards, Fan Dance, Beautiful River and Water Shadow, Folk Dance from Southern China and Fan Dance in Breeze. In 2013, Taiwan Le-Yun won first place in the Taiwan Dance Festival.

The group also distributed 2014 poster calendars and red envelopes to the audience following the performance. Giving red envelopes is a Chinese tradition that symbolizes the wishing of luck and prosperity for the New Year.

