

# PRESIDENT'S UPDATE

COVERING MAY 2017



## President's Message



May at Rio Hondo College simply can't be beat. Our campus echoes with the sounds of success every year at this time, when so many of our students are completing the first stage of their college careers or wrapping up the skills training needed to embark on new careers.

It's a tangible feeling, this excitement, and never more present than at our annual commencement celebration. The ceremony evokes a powerful sense of the endless possibilities that are available to our students, no matter what path they pursue. On behalf of our talented educators and dedicated staff and administration, the

Teresa Dreyfuss

Rio Hondo College community is honored to have played a part in making these opportunities available.

Access to a college education is one of the greatest gifts we can give our community. In May, Rio Hondo College acted upon that ideal in a new and concrete fashion, announcing a program that will cover first-year tuition for 2017 high school graduates of District area public and private high schools. Called the Rio Hondo College Promise, the program features special support services, including priority registration and enrollment in our Summer Bridge Academy, which helps students acclimate to the demands of college.

This month's President's Update also highlights outstanding students, scholarship recipients and our spring efforts to support our students.

## Hundreds Graduate from Rio Hondo College

An attorney from Downey who has helped helm Rio Hondo College's innovative Pathway to Law School program urged graduates at the College's 54<sup>th</sup> annual Commencement Ceremony on May 25 to seek out tough challenges because they bring equally great rewards.

Ricardo Perez, a civil lawyer who often advocates on behalf of children's and immigrant rights, told graduates how President John F. Kennedy set a goal for landing on the Moon – not because it was easy, but because it was hard.

"Think about that for a moment. Kennedy was choosing to go to the Moon, not because it was easy, but because it was hard," Perez said. "That is powerful. As I stand before you, I say, let us adopt Kennedy's words. Let us make them words we live by. Let us do things and set goals, not because they are easy, but because they are hard."

Perez shared his journey from Mexico to the U.S., his youth as an undocumented child living in a gang-dominated neighborhood, and his successful efforts to attend UCLA and law school.

"We were from a small Mexican town," he said. "We left our families, our friends, our jobs, our schools, our entire way of life."

In America, his family lived in fear of being discovered and deported, and contended with gangs that claimed the lives of close friends. He started work at age 13 – as a birthday party clown, and later helped his family sell clothes at the Rose Bowl Flea Market.

That's when he began to dream of attending UCLA – and succeeded, though he said he had trouble finding his place.

Later, at Loyola Law School, Perez again struggled to find his place – so much so that he dropped out during his first try. Later, he said, he learned to forge connections with classmates and his community. **Continued on page 2**



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# Hundreds Graduate from Rio Hondo College (Continued)

## Degree numbers climb



This year, Rio Hondo College students earned 1,981 degrees in summer/fall 2016 and spring 2017. The number includes 742 degrees for transfer – which guarantee admission to Cal State University campuses.

"Each year at Rio Hondo College, we see an acceleration in accomplishments from our talented and dedicated students," Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss said. "It's a great confirmation of our mission to provide students with access and opportunity as they pursue their higher-education dreams."

Class valedictorian Jianshu Chi (pictured above) immigrated to the U.S. from China at age 17. He plans to study computer science at Southern Taiwan University for Science and Technology before pursuing a Bachelor of Science degree at UC Berkeley.

The ceremony also marked the graduation of the second cohort of students in Rio Hondo College's Pathway to Law School program. This year, 15 students are matriculating to such universities as UCLA, UC Berkeley, UC Irvine, UC Riverside, Cal State Los Angeles, and Cal State Long Beach for the second stage of their three-part journey to law school.

## Dance and Pathway to Law School

This spring marked the first graduation of students with Associate of Arts degrees in dance, one of the College's newest programs. With mortarboards decorated with dance terminology, pointe shoes hanging from some of their necks, the graduating dancers literally danced their way to the podium to receive their diplomas. Dr. Alyson Cartagena, (pictured below) who directs the program, held a sign reading "First in Dance" with footprints of a dancer standing in a ballet "first position." The first class includes Joel David Carrillo-Espinoza, Melissa Nicole Fuentes, William Neal Trevilla, and Ashley

Lopez with Sheena Castillo, Vanessa Heffernan, Cynthia Gonzalez, and Christopher Chavez following this summer.

## Nursing, public safety

Students in Rio Hondo College's nursing program received pins on Wednesday,



May 24 to mark their success. In all, 75 students received associate degrees in nursing, 24 received vocational nursing certifications and more than 65 received certifications this year from Rio Hondo College's several nursing assistant programs.

Many of the students with associate degrees are already enrolled in bachelor's programs through partnerships with California State University, Los Angeles, Azusa Pacific University and University of Phoenix.

Rio Hondo College is also home to acclaimed public safety training programs, which hold their graduations throughout the year. This year, 29 police cadets graduated in January; 40 more are expected to graduate in August. The Fire Academy will graduate 36 cadets, the EMT program will graduate 89 students and the Wildland Fire Academy will graduate 40 cadets this year.



# Board Report



Rio Hondo College students studying social work will find it easier to complete their bachelor degrees at Whittier College under a new pact between the two colleges that guarantees admission, waives application fees for 10 students and provides scholarships of \$500 to \$2,000.

Board members approved the plan unanimously at their May 10 meeting, along with two other efforts to support students:

- ▶ Trustees established priority registration status for students who sign up for the new Rio Hondo College Promise, a support program that will provide free first-year tuition for 2017 graduates of area public and private high schools.
- ▶ The board expanded a statement of support for students, adding in language that clarifies support for students who are transgender and gender non-conforming.

Trustees also recognized long-time Career Center Counselor/Coordinator Belen Torres-Gil, the 2017 recipient of the Distinguished Faculty Award. Torres-Gil is retiring this spring after 29 years as a counselor and professor.

Trustees noted several retirees in May, as well:

- ▶ Dr. Manuel Baca, who joined the College in 1982, served a faculty member, interim superintendent/president, director of EOP&S, vice president of student services and interim dean for several departments.
- ▶ Adele Enright, hired in 1990 as a librarian/professor, retires after 27 years of service.
- ▶ Steve Koell, hired part time in 1981 and full time in 1981 as a reading professor, retires after 36 years of service.
- ▶ Henry Sauceda, hired in 1979 as a counselor/professor, retires after 38 years of service.
- ▶ Jan La Turno, hired in 1989 as a full-time mathematics professor, retires after 28 years.
- ▶ Stephanie Wells, hired in 1989 as librarian/professor, retires after 28 years.

Trustees also recognized 10 staff and administrators who completed the Rio Hondo College Leadership Academy: Karl Aragundi, Ethel Battles, Enrique Bravo, Maria Carmona-Herrera, Arely Castaneda, Ruthie Flores Retana, Andrea Lassiter, Moises Mata, Sylvia Viramontes Bunday, and Janice Willis – all members of Cohort VI.

Also at the meeting, counselor Troy Flores-Olson gave a presentation on his sabbatical efforts to improve career-preparation guidance, especially for the rising number of millennials served by Rio Hondo College. The effort included the creation of a video for students who are undecided about their majors, industry field trips for students, a career collaborative pilot program and a self-directed career guidance tutorial.

Board members also received a presentation on the College's emergency operations plans and recognized staff members of the *El Paisano* student newspaper for their recent success in a state journalism contest.



## Student Pursues Legal Career

Matthew Ruiz, a participant in Rio Hondo College's Pathway to Law School program, landed an internship at the Los Angeles County Office of the District Attorney this spring after hearing prosecutor Maria Ramirez speak at the College.



The Pathway to Law School program helps students connect with four-year universities to complete their degrees and then secure admission to law schools.

Ruiz has been accepted to UC Irvine, Loyola Marymount University and UCLA.

## Rose Hills Donation Supports Veterans



Rose Hills Memorial Park and Mortuary made a \$2,500 donation to the Rio Hondo College Foundation in May to support veterans services. The memorial park, which neighbors Rio Hondo College, has made similar gifts in the last few years.

## Students Sign College Intent Letters

Rio Hondo College beach volleyball players Carleigh Cruz, and Paula Alfred signed letters of intent in May to attend Hope International University. The duo will play volleyball under scholarships to the university.



## Students Overcome Challenges

Rio Hondo College honored three students at its 54<sup>th</sup> Commencement Ceremony, recognizing a dedication to achieving their higher-education goals that propelled them past significant obstacles.

### ▲ Natasha Rubalcava



Mired in gang culture, Rubalcava was shot at, stabbed and landed in juvenile detention centers. Her life was at risk daily. But, after the birth of her daughter, she pledged to leave the life of violence and danger to ensure she would have a legacy to pass on to her daughter.

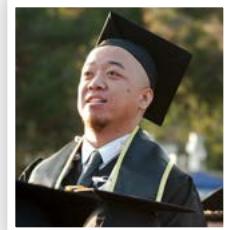
Unsure if she had the academic tools to succeed in college, this single mother enrolled at Rio Hondo College to learn what she could accomplish.

The answer: A lot.

Rubalcava learned she was much smarter than she had given herself credit for. She signed up for Extended Opportunity Program and Services/Cooperative Agencies Resources for Education (EOP&S/CARE), which provide students in need with support and understanding. With their help, she achieved a 4.0 GPA, held a part-time job, tended to her daughter, attended workshops, and volunteered as a motivational speaker to help other youths find better paths for themselves.

She graduated with honors as part of the Alpha Gamma Sigma, a statewide community college honors society. She will pursue a degree in social work at Whittier College with the goal of giving back to the community by running a nonprofit organization for domestic violence and vulnerable youth.

### ▲ Joseph Chen



Joseph Chen didn't have the grades in high school to land in a four-year university. Even if he had, he had no idea what he wanted to study. That's when Rio Hondo College came into the picture.

In addition to pursuing the courses he thought he had to take, Chen decided to pursue a heartfelt passion for automotive technology. He enrolled in a class taught by Professor John Frala, who he says sparked a realization that he could have a fulfilling career in the field.

Make that a firestorm. Chen pursued the program's A.S. in alternative fuels and fuel cells, earning his degree with a GPA of 3.28.

Now, with the backing of Frala and his colleagues, he is up for a job with alternative-fuels innovator Tesla Motors.

Chen is graduating with his A.A., but he won't be disappearing from Rio Hondo's campus. He is among the first students who are enrolling in the College's historic Bachelor of Science program in automotive technology.

### ▲ Jessica Nguyen



Nguyen, a fall 2016 graduate, came to the U.S. as a sophomore in high school from Vietnam. Together, with her sister, she left her parents and her home country to seek a better life. When she arrived, Nguyen spoke no English, but didn't let that deter her from pursuing a dream to attend UCLA.

She enrolled at Rio Hondo College and became part of the EOP&S program. Even while holding down a full-time job in a nail salon, she worked feverishly to earn good grades even as she continued to build her language skills.

Nguyen's work paid off as she earned a nearly perfect 3.9 GPA – earning only one B at Rio Hondo – and secured transfer admission to UCLA. She hopes to help family members who remained in Vietnam once she obtains her bachelor's degree.

# Fire, EMT, Nursing Students Join Forces for Bomb Simulation

More than 100 students from Rio Hondo College's nursing program, EMT training, theatre arts program and fire academy joined efforts May 12 to respond to a staged crisis drill that required them to translate classroom learning into on-the-job performance.

The fifth annual crisis response simulation – held twice on the same day to accommodate the high number of participants – tested students' ability to handle a bomb simulation. Four Rio Hondo College theatre arts students played the part of the injured.

About 90 nursing students accessed and cared for the wounded. Eight fire academy cadets conducted ground operations to rescue trapped victims and 12 EMT cadets transported the injured to the Roadrunner simulation hospital for treatment.

Following the drill, participants analyzed the scenario in a debriefing session.

**RIO IN THE NEWS!** Watch NBC coverage of Rio Hondo College's crisis response scenario.



# Guardian Scholars Program Raises Awareness of Foster Youth Issues

Rio Hondo College held a series of events in May to mark Foster Care Awareness Month, including specialized training, an open house on services, a barbecue, talks on support for foster youth and becoming a foster parent.

The events, held throughout the month, focused on providing information on foster youth issues in a fun, informative and educational way for students, staff and community partners:

- ▶ The Office of the Guardian Scholars Program, Youth Empowerment Strategies for Success and the Foster & Kinship Care Education Program held an open house and barbecue to share information about services available to foster youth and foster parents.
- ▶ Staff and faculty members also received information on the steps to become a foster/resource parent. Students and staff were invited to express their emotions through therapeutic painting co-sponsored with Psychological Services.
- ▶ A training session provided information on how to identify commercial sexual exploitation of children.
- ▶ Guest speaker Sade Burrell shared key elements for supporting foster youth throughout their educational journey to increase access, retention and graduation.



- ▶ A student panel of former foster youths inspired attendees to take an extra step to improve the lives of foster youths by showing care and willingness to help.
- ▶ Lastly, the seventh annual "Children are the Future" one-day conference took place at the Doubletree Hotel in Whittier. The event honored caregivers and professionals who make a difference in a child's life by staying informed and involved in their well-being.



## College Honors 52 Outstanding Students

Rio Hondo College honored 52 students with Outstanding Student Awards on May 5. Each student received a certificate and a \$100 check, thanks to the Rio Hondo College Foundation. Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss gave welcoming remarks at the event.



# 54 Students Receive 75 Scholarships

Fifty-four Rio Hondo College students received more than 75 scholarships this spring, thanks to the Rio Hondo College Foundation. The awards were given out to a packed Campus Inn audience of students and their families on May 19.

Vice President of Academic Affairs Dr. Joanna Schilling, who offered opening remarks, thanked family members for supporting their students.

Rio Hondo College Foundation President John Peel encouraged students to do their research, and to remain curious and generous.

"We need scholarships in the future, and if you remain curious and generous, you'll be able to become future donors," Peel said.

He also thanked the donors who helped make the gifts possible.

## Recipients:

- ▶ A Taste of Rio Transfer Scholarship: Kassandra Cuellar
- ▶ American Association of University Women: Oralia Alcorta, Sandra Herrera, Leah Nolden
- ▶ BC McCabe Foundation Nursing Scholarship: Monica Gonzalez, Ponlok Huot, Lorraine Montana
- ▶ BC McCabe Foundation Veterans Scholarship: Ponlok Huot, Erik Ramirez
- ▶ Charles and Bonnie Isaacs Memorial Spring Scholarship: Germayne Castillo
- ▶ Denos (Gus) Carras Memorial Scholarship: Peter Camacho Jr.
- ▶ Don L. Jenkins Biology Scholarship: Dianne Saldana
- ▶ Harry L. Keats Memorial Scholarship: Kassandra Cuellar
- ▶ Henderson Family Scholarship: Tyerra Starr Boyd
- ▶ Jean Korf Theatre Arts Scholarship: Ajianna Covington
- ▶ Jean McAndrews Bilar Memorial Scholarship: Marisol Avelar
- ▶ Library Scholarship: Jorge Espinoza
- ▶ Osher Initiative for California Community Colleges Scholarship: Oralia Alcorta, Angelica Becerra, Tyerra Boyd, Yadira Castaneda, Germayne Castillo, Brenda Coronel, Kassandra Cuellar, Natalie Dovales-Flores, Jorge Espinoza, Arthur Flores, Hector Garcia, Andrew Gonzalez, Monica Gonzalez, Melody Greer, Jaqueline Hernandez, Sandra Herrera, Ponlok Huot, Maral Kalayci, Ashley Keasey, Yvette Lopez, Amy Mai-Gonzalez, Sha Mie Maralit, Zackary Mejia, Mercedes Navarro, Adriana Ortega, Henry Perez, Chanel Rangel, Rose Rivas, Yarisma Rocha, Arely Rodriguez, Leslie Rosales, Natasha Rubalcava, Dianne Saldava, Dat Trang, Naomy Villanueva, Paul Anthony Reilly
- ▶ Rio Hondo College Follett Bookstore Scholarship: Natalie Felin Dovales-Flores, Luisa Mesones
- ▶ Rio Hondo College CalWORKs Scholarship: Brenda Yaneth Hernandez
- ▶ Rio Hondo College Management and Confidential Council Scholarship: Tyerra Starr Boyd, Katheryne Lilianna Castillo
- ▶ Rio Hondo College Counselors' Open Door Scholarship: Faustino Gonzales Barrales
- ▶ Rio Hondo College Counselors' Transfer Scholarship: Mercedes Navarro, Tyerra Starr Boyd
- ▶ Rio Hondo College Faculty Association Scholarship: Natalie Dovales-Flores, Melody Greer, Jason Hoang, Maral Kalayci, Yarisma Rocha, Natasha Rubalcava, Rose Rivas, Dianne Saldana, Sofia Toroledo, Tuan Vo
- ▶ Rio Hondo College Emeriti Scholarship Luisa Mesones, Naomy Villanueva
- ▶ Soñando al Otro Lado del Rio Scholarship: Faustino Gonzalez Barrales
- ▶ Ted Snyder Journalism Scholarship: Malissa Myers
- ▶ Wetsman Family Anthropology Scholarship: Jasmine Sanchez
- ▶ Rotary Club of Whittier Scholarship: Leah Nolden



# College Provides Food Help during Finals

More than 50 Rio Hondo College staff members, administrators, faculty and student volunteers distributed 1,800 breakfast burritos, 475 boxes of pizza (by the slice!), 20 crates of fruit, hot coffee, juice and water as well as 900 RHC-Care Packages to students before final exams.

The efforts, overseen by RHC Student Life and Student Equity programs, are designed to ensure students and their families don't go hungry.

Two local food pantries played a key role: Food Finders and Heart of Compassion provided the RHC Food Access Task Force with about 2,400 pounds of packaged foods, fresh produce and personal hygiene products.

Food Finders delivered to the campus packaged pastas/rice, canned fruits/vegetables/meats/soups, an array of healthy snack items and toothpaste. Heart of Compassion donated crates of soft drinks, granola bars and dry goods, and a wide variety of fruits (bananas, oranges, cantaloupes, melons, mangos, and lemons).

Student Life and Student Equity will re-stock the RHC food pantry throughout the summer with additional donations.

In the coming year, the task force will attempt to sustain the RHC food pantry with continuous pallets of foods from local food partners and establish a sustainable distribution cycle for students in the fall semester.

For more information about the RHC Food Access Task Force, contact Ceci Rocha at the Student Equity Office (562) 463-7066, or at [crocha@riohondo.edu](mailto:crocha@riohondo.edu).



## College Announces Free Tuition, Student Support Plan

Some 200 high school students and area educators packed Rio Hondo College's Wray Theater on May 4 for the College's announcement of its Rio Hondo College Promise, a program that provides free first-year tuition to 2017 graduates of the area's public and private high schools.

**RIO IN THE NEWS!** Click here to read more about Rio Hondo's Free Tuition Announcement in *ABC Eyewitness News*.

Students cheered as Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss asked them their view of the plan, which includes priority registration and support services. Other speakers included Los Angeles County Supervisor Hilda Solis, a former Rio Hondo College trustee.

The Promise builds on a support program offered since 2011 to students from El Monte and South El Monte called the El Monte Pledge.

The new effort builds on other innovative Rio Hondo College programs as well, such as a Summer Bridge Academy that helps orient students to the challenges of higher education, counseling, tutoring and other academic support initiatives that have become a hallmark of the College.

In addition to the Wray Theater presentation, the College held a VIP reception with elected leaders.



## Connect with Us on Social Media

 **RHCRoadrunners**

 **RioHondo\_College**

 **RioHondoCollege**

 **Rio Hondo College YT Channel**

 **bit.do/riohondocollege**

 **#iLoveRioHondo**

## 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.

## Save the Date



**6 p.m. Wednesday, July 12** Board of Trustees meeting, Rio Hondo College

# START RIO... GO ANYWHERE

**It's time to apply and register!**

**Summer**

**CLASSES BEGIN**

**June 5, 19 and July 10**  
(Five summer sessions available)

**Fall 2017**

**Open Registration Begins**  
**August 15**

**CLASSES BEGIN**  
**August 19**



Schedule of classes available at  
**[www.riohondo.edu](http://www.riohondo.edu)**