

FOCUS ON RÍO

April–May 2020

President's Message



Dr. Arturo Reyes

of a historic pilot program to offer four-year degrees at a select number of community colleges.

In addition, during the pandemic, Río Hondo College has stepped up to assist our students as they face unprecedented educational and life challenges. We have distributed more than \$800,000 in aid to students and we anticipate

Even as our College contends with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have much to celebrate this spring. This year, nearly 2,000 students earned Associate of Arts and Science degrees – a number that grows each year, demonstrating Río Hondo College's impact on our community.

We also have our second cohort of students graduating from our Bachelor of Science program in automotive technology, as part

providing millions more over the coming months. These funds will provide a lifeline for many in our community to begin to recover from the extended closures and job losses.

The Río Hondo College community is proud not only of its current graduating class, but of its students in the Associate Degree of Nursing program, who are volunteering in our community; and, of past graduates including a Fire Academy-trained EMT who helped save lives in New York this April.

Once again, I would like to acknowledge the significance of our partnership with our community and celebrate how Río Hondo College works to elevate the futures of our students as well as contribute to the overall well-being of our community.

This commitment is one of our hallmarks, but it has never been more on display than during this most unsettled of times. As always, our Río Hondo community, gives me great pride.

Mensaje del Presidente

Mientras nuestro Colegio enfrenta los impactos de la pandemia de COVID-19, tenemos mucho que celebrar esta primavera. Este año, casi 2,000 estudiantes obtuvieron el título de Asociado de Artes y Ciencias: un número que crece cada año, demostrando el impacto del Colegio de Río Hondo en nuestra comunidad.

También tenemos nuestra segunda clase de estudiantes graduándose con una licenciatura en ciencias en tecnología automotriz, como parte de un programa exploratorio histórico para ofrecer títulos de cuatro años en colegios comunitarios selectos.

Además, durante la pandemia, el Colegio de Río Hondo ha dado un paso al

frente para ayudar a nuestros estudiantes enfrentar sus desafíos educativos y personales sin precedentes. Nosotros hemos distribuido más de \$800,000 en ayuda a los estudiantes y anticipamos proporcionar millones más en los próximos meses. Estos fondos ofrecen un salvavidas para que muchos en nuestra comunidad comiencen a recuperarse de los cierres y las pérdidas de trabajo.

La comunidad del Colegio de Río Hondo se orgullese al igual de sus estudiantes en el programa de Enfermería, que son voluntarios en nuestra comunidad; y, de los graduados anteriores, incluyendo un paramédico entrenado en la Academia que ayudó a salvar vidas en Nueva York en abril.

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COLLEGE**

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College Celebrates 2020 Grads with Drive-through Care Package Pickup, Webpage

Río Hondo College celebrated its 2020 graduating class on May 26 and 27 with a drive-through distribution of "Grad Care Packages" that include traditional graduation gear along with some surprises.

The events were held in lieu of the College's traditional ceremonies because of COVID-19 concerns and followed the same safety guidelines used for the College's drive-through food pantry. This is Río Hondo College's 57th annual Commencement.

The route students took to get their packages was festooned with balloons, signs and posters; students were also being invited to submit their photos, major information and a quote for a celebratory slideshow on a special [Commencement Celebration Page](#) on the College website.

In addition, a virtual commencement address has been delivered to students from Associated Students of Río Hondo College President Christina Almanza. Almanza is a Chicana, first-generation college student and a founding member of the College's Queer Initiative Program. She earned her Associate Degree for Transfer in psychology and will attend UC Berkeley starting spring 2021.

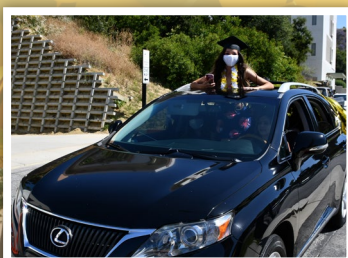
"We'd much rather hold our regular commencement ceremony together, but our students' health and safety must take priority over even this most significant of celebrations," Superintendent/President Dr. Arturo Reyes said. "Despite the changes we've had to make, nothing can dim our pride in our students and their accomplishments."

This year, 1,918 students earned Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees, many of which will guarantee admission to the California State University system. In addition, the College is graduating 10 students as part of its second cohort of recipients of a Bachelor of Science degree in automotive technology. Río Hondo is one of a few California community colleges to offer a bachelor's degree as part of a historic state program.

College leaders are also inviting graduates to return in spring 2021 for an in-person celebration.



**Associated Students of Río Hondo College
President Christina Almanza**

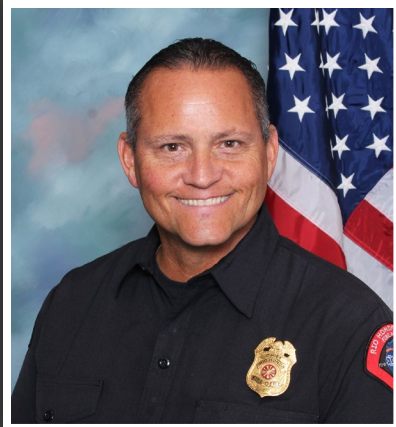


Valedictorians Lead Class of 2020

Río Hondo College's Class of 2020 is led by two valedictorians – Zachary Alexander Alvidrez, an engineering major and member of the Math, Engineering and Science Achievement (MESA) program; and Carolina “Lina” Campillo, a political science major, student trustee, member of the Pathway to Law School and gold medal recipient for Forensics Speech & Debate.

Alvidrez was born and raised in Whittier. After graduating from Whittier High School in 2013, he joined the Marines, where he served as an infantryman. After his military service, Alvidrez enrolled at Río Hondo College where he found the MESA center. In an effort to excel, Alvidrez spent a great deal of time in the MESA center and attended Academic Excellence Workshops, where he formed many friendships with his peers and facilitators. Eventually, in participation with MESA, Alvidrez was led to facilitate weekly AEWs for physics and tutor in the MESA center. He has been part of RHC for three years, earning Associate of Science degrees in chemistry, physics, math, and general studies math and science. He will attend UC Berkeley as a chemistry major in fall 2020.

Campillo started at Río Hondo College at age 16 after graduating high school as a sophomore, anxious and afraid. Because of her supportive parents and her dream of one day attending law school, she propelled forward. Along the way, she met the most kindhearted professors, faculty and staff in her time as a member of the Pathway to Law School program, PUENTE and captain of the Forensics Speech & Debate team. In her last year at Río Hondo, Lina served as the student trustee, bringing students' voices to the board. She will continue the next chapter of her life at UCLA, pursuing a degree in philosophy.



English, Fire Academy Leaders Named 2020 Fellows of the College

Río Hondo College has named a top English academic and an instructor who helped propel the College's Fire Academy to national prominence as its 2020 Fellows of the College. Both individuals are recipients of the Community College system's highest honor, the Hayward Award.

Dr. Lynette Nyaggah taught linguistics, English and English as a New Language for 32 years; she is a recipient of the 2019 Hayward Award.

Nyaggah earned a Bachelor of Arts in linguistics at UC Berkeley and her Master of Arts and doctorate in theoretical linguistics at UCLA, specializing in African languages.

She has been teaching since 1976, starting at Cal State Fullerton. She has taught at K-12 public schools, Cerritos College and the University of Nairobi in Kenya. She joined Río Hondo College in 1987.

Chief Tracy E. Rickman, who retired in 2019, received the 2020 Hayward Award. Rickman helped lead and expand Río Hondo's highly respected firefighter training academies and launched a cadet crew that battles California wildfires. He served the College for 22 years, training cadets to fight urban fires, wildland fires and serve as emergency medical technicians.

Rickman oversaw the refurbishment of the Fire Academy and the design and construction of the College's Regional Homeland Security Training Center, for which he also assisted in securing federal appropriations. In 2001, he helped create Roadrunners Fire Crew 77, which is called up multiple times a year to aid the U.S. Forest Service fight wildfires.

Under Rickman's watch, Río Hondo College enjoyed a surge in cadet placements, with 100 percent of wildland cadets finding employment and a high percent of urban firefighters doing the same.



District Update

Río Hondo College's Board of Trustees on May 13 redoubled its commitment to vulnerable communities facing challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic, including undocumented residents, individuals of Asian/Pacific Islander heritage and those who struggle with food insecurity, housing and access to internet and mental health resources.

Trustees unanimously adopted three resolutions to assert their support for these communities.

The [first resolution](#) supports Gov. Gavin Newsom's plan to offer relief funds to undocumented residents and opposes a lawsuit challenging the effort. The resolution notes the College's commitment to providing educational opportunities to students of all backgrounds, including those who are undocumented.

The [second resolution](#) denounces xenophobia, especially targeting people of Asian/Pacific Islander heritage who have faced stigmatizing rhetoric since the outbreak of the viral illness. The resolution notes the high population of Asian/Pacific Islanders in the San Gabriel Valley as well as among Río Hondo College's student body.

The [third resolution](#) affirms Río Hondo's unwavering commitment to student success and equity, acknowledging the significant financial challenges caused by COVID-19 – especially for students already facing economic challenges. The resolution notes Río Hondo College's commitment to helping students with access to food, housing support, internet connectivity and access to computer resources, as well as access to mental health services.

In addition to the resolutions trustees also recognized seven retiring faculty members and one retiring staff member. The retirees include:

- Lupe Alvarado, a counselor/professor who served the College for 32 years.
- Ada Brown, a professor of studio art, painting and design who joined the College part time in 1995 and full time in 2004.
- Robert Botello, an instructor of mathematics who started part time in 1997 and full time in 2000.
- Karleen Curlee, a professor of reading hired in 1991 who also served as a learning assistant and tutorial services coordinator.
- Julie Huang, a professor of business management who started part time in 1998 and full time in 2000.
- Kathy Pudelko, a professor of kinesiology and coordinator of the Fitness Center, hired in 1996. Pudelko also served as a women's basketball coach from 1996 to 2009.
- JoAnn Springer, a professor of English who was hired in 1999.
- Patricia Slavich, an instructional division secretary in Kinesiology, Dance and Athletics hired in 2014.

Fire Academy Graduate Provides COVID-19 EMT Support in New York

When Kahanu Zimmerman graduated from Río Hondo College Fire Academy's Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) program in 2019, he never dreamed that less than a year later he would be employing his disaster training in the epicenter of a global pandemic.

In April, Zimmerman, who is an EMT with a Southern California ambulance service, volunteered to join a FEMA call to action and was deployed to New York City. For two weeks, Zimmerman ran intra-facility transfers between NYC hospitals in the Bronx, transporting patients, most of whom were COVID-19 positive, and helping to ease overcrowded conditions.

Zimmerman also made trips to the airport to pick up emergency supplies of oxygen, ventilators and personal protective equipment and deliver them to hospitals. Zimmerman and his partners witnessed chaotic scenes in the ER and saw many patients die even before they could be properly treated.

Zimmerman also spent two weeks on 911 duty in Queens, working directly with the New York Fire Department, and was part of an EMT team that saved the life of a NY police officer after an accident that smashed the officer's legs between two cars.

"The biggest lesson I learned at Río Hondo was to prepare for the worst. More than anything, that training helped me to do the best job I could in New York," Zimmerman said. "What I saw in the emergency rooms was much worse than what you see on TV. Still, I feel proud that I was able to save lives and reunite families. That's what EMTs train for, to make a difference."

Río Hondo Fire Academy EMT program is designed to prepare students to pass the National Registry EMT exam. The rigorous curriculum includes 16 written tests, 35 hands-on skills tests, eight hours of observe-and-assist work in an ER and 16 hours in ambulance ride-alongs. The program is available as an eight- or 16-week course.

"Kahanu is a special person and we are extremely proud of what he has accomplished already in such a short time," Río Hondo EMT Program Director Scott Jaeggi said. "His experiences are some of the most extraordinary and amazing stories I have heard. Kahanu is what we want all Río Hondo EMTs to aspire to be – fearless, prepared and ready to mobilize at a moment's notice."

Now back in Los Angeles, Zimmerman said he has had trouble coping with all that he has seen, including the death of two of his colleagues, one from acquiring the virus and one from suicide. Zimmerman credits coping mechanisms he learned at Río Hondo for helping him keep physically and emotionally fit during a time when he was at risk for acquiring the virus himself.

"I love spending time with my family. As an EMT you have to have a support system around you, people you can talk to and relax with," Zimmerman said. "My message to EMT trainees is that studying is so important, and you need to keep your skills fresh. You never know when disaster will strike, but if you can handle the stress you will make a positive impact on so many lives."





Nursing Students Volunteer at El Monte City COVID-19 Testing Station

Throughout the spring, 16 students in their first year of Río Hondo College's Associate Degree of Nursing (ADN) program volunteered at the El Monte City Drive-through COVID-19 testing station, lending a hand to efforts to combat the health crisis that immobilized much of the world.

Students began volunteering in April and continued throughout May, rotating through stations to work with nurses from Greater El Monte Community Hospital to instruct community members on testing, distribute testing materials, collect samples and educate patients.

"We applaud our students for their passion for their chosen field of study, for taking the initiative to serve our community and for demonstrating the incredible character that is a hallmark of our Río Hondo College students," Superintendent/President Dr. Arturo Reyes said.

Río Hondo College's two-year ADN program prepares students for employment as registered nurses. The program is approved by the California State Board of Registered Nursing. Graduates receive an Associate of Science Degree of Nursing and are qualified to take the examination leading to licensure as a Registered Nurse. In addition to the ADN program, the College offers a transitional pathway for licensed vocational nurses to receive their ADNs.

The program has 40 students in its fundamental course, 80 students in the first year and 80 in the second year.

"For any student, donating time and services is rewarding. For a nursing student, these experiences can provide unique insights into specialized topics and everyday experiences, including ethics and clinical judgment," said Catherine Page, dean of Health Science and Nursing. "Employers look for these experiences."



RIO IN THE NEWS:
Whittier Mayor Thanks College. [Watch the Video](#)

Whittier Mayor Joe Vinatieri – during a YouTube broadcast COVID-19 update in April, thanked Río Hondo College for its assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic response effort. Vinatieri highlighted the College's ongoing food pantry efforts and distribution of Chromebooks for student use.

College Provides \$882,400 to Students to Ease COVID-19 Impact

Río Hondo College has awarded \$882,400 in grants to 2,205 students as part of a federal act designed to assist those whose studies have been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The grants are funded by \$3.1 million in federal CARES Act funding received by the College for direct student grants. The money is divided among a Río Cares Student Relief Fund, support for students with federal Work Study jobs and an Emergency Grant program.

"We are immensely grateful to the federal government for providing this tool to assist our students, whose lives have been thrown into turmoil by the COVID-19 pandemic," Río Hondo College Superintendent/President Dr. Arturo Reyes said. "Many of them have lost jobs, face food insecurity, housing issues and the need to care for other family members – all while trying to pursue their education. These grants will provide support at a critical time."

So far, Río Hondo College has provided \$830,400 in Río Cares Student Relief Fund grants to 2,120 students. Grants include \$300 each for 1,148 students enrolled in at least six units and \$500 each for 972 students enrolled in 12 or more units.

Students who filed a 2019-2020 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) automatically received their grants. Students who have not yet filed the 2019-2020 FAFSA may do so until June 15.

The College estimates 3,267 additional students may be eligible for the grants. Funds will be available through June 30, 2021, or until the funds are depleted.

In addition, the CARES Act is providing payments for the rest of the academic year for federal Work Study students who had to cease working because of the pandemic. So far, 85 Río Hondo College students have received \$52,000 through that aspect of the program.

Emergency Grants are being made available to assist students who are struggling with expenses or unforeseen financial challenges, such as housing, food, childcare, transportation, medical bills or educational supplies.

This grant was made available to students from 9 a.m. May 13 through 11:59 p.m. May 15. The College anticipates it will provide more than 500 students with Emergency Grants of \$300 to \$500 for a total of \$200,000. The grants will be distributed by June 19.

Students may qualify for either a Río Cares Relief Fund grant or an Emergency Grant if they file a FAFSA, qualify for federal financial aid, are enrolled in 6 units (\$300) or 12 units or more (\$500), have a \$0 expected family contribution, meet satisfactory academic progress requirements and, if male, are registered with the Selective Service System.

Separate from the CARES Act, Río Hondo is committed to expeditiously aiding students affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Río Hondo has made available a variety of financial and non-financial resources. Information can be found at www.riohondo.edu/student-health-services/coronavirus/#students.

Río Hondo College is working to support all students during this time. For questions, please e-mail covidgrants@riohondo.edu or call the Financial Aid office at (562) 463-3370.

College Receives \$15,000 in Gifts for CARE Students

Río Hondo College has received \$15,000 in gifts from community groups for its Cooperative Agencies Resources for Education (CARE) Program, which helps provide educational support services and activities for academically under-prepared, welfare-dependent, single parents.

CARE students are part of EOP&S, which serves more than 1,600 students at Río Hondo College.

The gifts, presented May 22 to Río Hondo College Superintendent/President Dr. Arturo Reyes, EOP&S/CARE Director Heba Griffiths, and CARE Specialist Laura Verdugo, include \$5,000 from Soroptimist International of Whittier and \$10,000 from Credit Union of Southern California.

"This show of support from our Soroptimist sisters and the Credit Union of Southern California is a terrific testimonial to our community partnerships and the impact of Río Hondo College in helping residents overcome challenges to pursue their educational dreams," Verdugo said.

Verdugo is also a member of the Soroptimist, which also offers annual scholarships that benefit Río Hondo College students each year.

This spring, 13 students in the CARE program will be among the more than 1,900 Río Hondo College students earning degrees.

"Part of Río Hondo College's mission is to ensure the promise of higher education reaches all members of our community, and especially those who otherwise would be unable to pursue their education," Superintendent/President Dr. Arturo Reyes said. "I am so thankful to our friends at the Soroptimist International of Whittier and Credit Union of Southern California for these unsolicited gifts for our students."



Connect with Us on Social Media



Serving the communities of

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

and portions of:

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

*Unincorporated communities within our District

Mission Statement

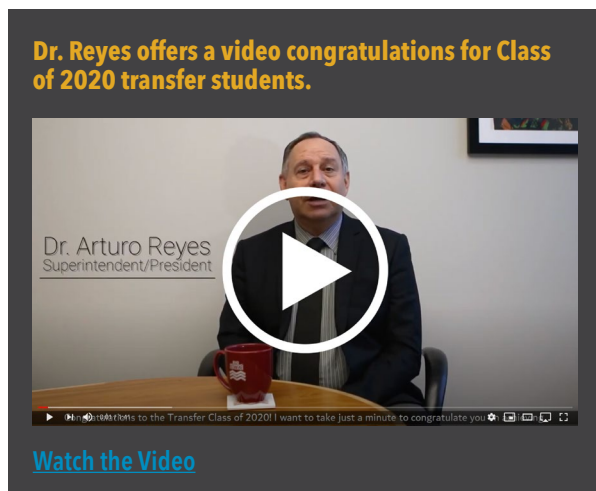
Río Hondo College is committed to the success of its diverse students and communities by providing dynamic educational opportunities and resources that lead to degrees, certificates, transfer, career and technical pathways, basic skills proficiency, and lifelong learning.

Mensaje del Presidente

(Continuación de la página 1)

Una vez más, me gustaría reconocer la importancia de nuestra buena relación con nuestra comunidad y celebrar cómo el Colegio de Río Hondo trabaja para mejorar el futuro de nuestros estudiantes, así como contribuir al bienestar general de nuestra comunidad.

Este compromiso es algo que nos distingue, pero nunca se ha notado más que durante esta época de incertidumbre. Como siempre, nuestra comunidad de Río Hondo me hace sentir muy orgulloso.



College to Host Blood Drives in June

Río Hondo College will host two on-campus blood drives in June in partnership with the American Red Cross to help ease a critical shortage of blood donations.

The drives are scheduled for 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday, June 9 in the Campus Inn and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday, June 23 in the Río Café.

All donors and staff will be screened before entering the blood drive area. Only healthy donors will be allowed inside. Donors must schedule appointments online to help maintain physical distancing. Donors can schedule appointments by visiting www.redcrossblood.org and entering the code: RioHondoCollege or by calling 1-800-RED-CROSS. Picture IDs will be required. Free parking will be provided in Lots B and C.



Save the Date

Through Friday, Aug. 14:
Fall Semester registration

Monday, June 1 to Friday, Aug. 7:
Summer session remote instruction

10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday, June 9:
Blood Drive, Campus Inn

6 p.m. Wednesday, June 10:
Board of Trustees regular meeting via Zoom, Río Hondo College

11 a.m. to noon Tuesday, June 16:
Budget town hall via Zoom.
RSVP to 562-908-340

10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday, June 23:
Blood Drive, Río Café

6 p.m. Wednesday, June 24:
Board of Trustees study session via Zoom, Río Hondo College

6 p.m. Wednesday, July 8:
Board of Trustees regular meeting via Zoom, Río Hondo College