

# FOCUS ON RÍO

May 2021

## President's Message



**Teresa Dreyfuss**

The concept of college graduation is not just an accumulation of years and skills lumped together for one day of festivities – it is a celebration of countless students, their hopes and aspirations as they finally realize their dreams.

In May, Río Hondo College honored many amazing students for their achievements, recognizing their triumph over hardship and bidding them farewell as they embark on new adventures. We are so proud

that Río Hondo College provides direction and structure to so many students in our community.

In this issue of Focus on Río e-newsletter, we celebrate a lifetime of growth for our graduates, reveling in their achievements and encouraging them on their journey to become their best selves.

## Río Hondo College Celebrates with CARmencement Ceremony

Río Hondo College hosted a festive CARmencement ceremony, welcoming graduates onto campus for a drive-thru event where they received their diplomas from the Board of Trustees, celebrating their milestone achievement alongside family members, faculty, staff and administrators on May 28.

This year, 1,778 students earned Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees. Of those degrees, 1,203 are Associate Degree for transfer, meaning they are eligible for admission to the California State University system.

This year, the College had two valedictorians: Alanya Chanvongnaraz, a civil engineering major who will attend California State Polytechnic University, Pomona in the fall; and Grant Lopez, a sociology major and student leader for Río Hondo College's RISE Scholars department. Chanvongnaraz and Lopez are this year's Marie I. Pellisier Award recipients.

The day's events included virtual remarks from Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss, Board of Trustees President Rosaelva Lomeli, Associated Students President Jason Reyes and the announcement of the Marie I. Pellisier Awards by Academic Senate President Dr. Kevin Smith.

"We are so excited to host a drive-through graduation ceremony because it allows our students yet another chance to be creative with decorating their vehicles to show off their Río Hondo College pride," Dreyfuss said. "The entire Río Hondo College community is eager to celebrate our graduates and give them a big send off before they attend four-year universities and start their careers as leaders."



RÍO HONDO COLLEGE

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# Grad Credits Río Hondo with Life's Success

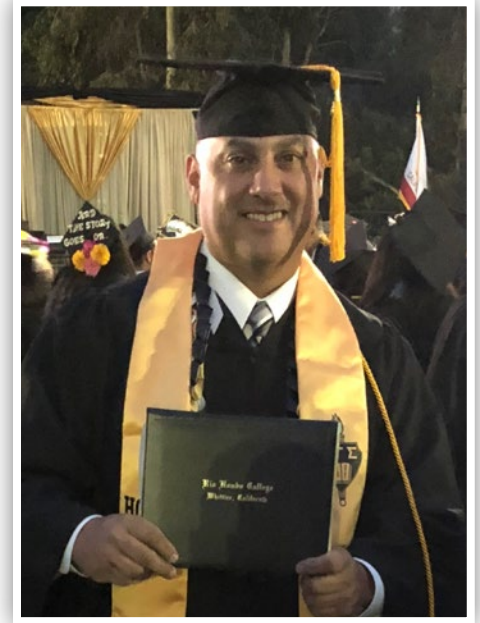
Arthur Flores said Río Hondo College changed his life, offering him overwhelming support and motivation that ultimately inspired him to graduate cum laude from California State University, Fullerton, enroll at University of Southern California (USC) and pursue his career aspirations.

Flores enrolled at Río Hondo College in 2015 to learn AutoCAD, a computer-aided design and drafting software application. He never attended high school and only had a seventh-grade education – yet his time at Río Hondo College

proved fruitful, since he graduated at the College with a 4.0 GPA and an Associate of Arts business transfer degree in 2018.

“Río Hondo College equipped me with skills that opened doors, enhanced my career, and developed my social awareness with the ability to articulate open communication with others,” Flores said.

Flores is currently enrolled at USC, where he is working to obtain his master of public administration.



## Río Hondo Fire Academy Celebrates Class 96

Río Hondo Fire Academy members beamed with pride during a graduation ceremony on May 27, as the college recognized the 48 cadets in Class 96 for their months of training.

The Class 96 members were the first Río Hondo College class to graduate under the State Fire Marshal's new curriculum, which provides fire academy graduates with Firefighter 1 certification on the day of their graduation.

Members were honored by family, friends, College administrators, faculty, staff and the Board of Trustees.



## Río Hondo College Celebrates LGBTQIA+ Pride Day

Showing solidarity and support to Río Hondo College's LGBTQIA+ community, Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss and the Board of Trustees hosted a flag-raising ceremony on May 28 to commemorate Pride Day and honor those who fought, and still fight, for queer rights, diversity and inclusion.



## Río Hondo College Honors 2021 Extraordinary Students

Río Hondo College honored five students with its 2021 Extraordinary Graduating Students award, a distinction that recognizes individuals who have reached their goals while overcoming adversity and personal tragedies.

This academic year's extraordinary students are Albert Steven Mendoza Jr., Luis Alberto Cruz, Dominic Castanon, Pretty Garcia, and Stephanie Paz. They were selected by faculty members and staff for their stellar work ethic and ambition for achievement.

Albert Steven Mendoza Jr. has turned his life around after spending years in and out of the Los Angeles County Jail system and struggling with drug addiction. One day, he decided enough was enough – he earned his GED and enrolled at Río Hondo College, where he excelled in subjects such as algebra and physics.

Mendoza has completed biophysics research at the City University of New York and is an active member of Extended Opportunity Programs and Service (EOP&S), the Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement (MESA) and TRIO Student Support Service STEM. Graduating with a 3.95 GPA, Mendoza will attend UCLA in the fall to study physics.

Luis Alberto Cruz turned self-doubt into success after nearly dropping out of Río Hondo College, faced with mounting academic struggles and his undocumented status while also finding his place in the LGBTQIA+ community. A trip to the College's Student Success and Dream Center showed that he could apply for financial aid while gaining support.

Cruz quit his full-time job and focused on his education, joining the MESA program. Graduating with a 3.7 GPA, Cruz will attend UC Berkeley to major in chemistry. Cruz was also awarded the prestigious Regents' and Chancellor's Scholarship from UC Berkeley.

Dominic Castanon joined Río Hondo College in spring 2020 through the Near Completion project. Castanon was originally a business major, but a near-fatal motorcycle accident in 2014 left him with a head trauma, a fractured spine and a severe diffuse axonal injury.

After learning to walk and talk again, Castanon decided to major in child development, pursuing his passion of helping others. Graduating with a 3.7 GPA, Castanon will attend California State Polytechnic University, Pomona in the fall to major in early childhood studies.

Pretty Garcia thought she made a mistake when she decided to study environmental science, believing the work to be too difficult. She would arrive on campus at 7 a.m. and leave after 10 p.m. every day before COVID-19 hit, continuing to study at local parks and in her car afterward. Her motivation to provide a better life for her family through education is driving her decision to become a synthetic biology researcher. Graduating with a 3.4 GPA, Garcia will attend UC Santa Cruz in the fall to study bioengineering.

Stephanie Paz is the definition of a determined, strong single mother. Paz originally enrolled at Río Hondo College in 2009, but struggled with the demands of being a single mother, a student and a full-time worker, and dropped out to focus on her career. In 2019, Paz knew she needed a change and re-enrolled at Río Hondo College to study sociology. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic disrupting her education, Paz secured at 3.6 GPA and will attend California State University, Los Angeles to study sociology in the fall.

"We are so proud of our Extraordinary Graduating Students, for overcoming so many obstacles to find true success," Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss said. "We know that these five graduates have bright futures ahead of them and we are glad to have encouraged and nurtured them on their academic journeys."

## Connect with Us on Social Media



RHCRoadrunners



RioHondo\_College



RioHondoCollege



Rio Hondo College YT Channel



bit.do/riohondocollege



rhcroadrunners

## 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 an educational and community partner committed to advancing social justice and equity as an antiracist institution that collectively invests in all students' academic and career pathways that lead to attainment of degree, certificate, transfer, and lifelong-learning goals.



REUTERS®

### RÍO IN THE NEWS:

See more Río Hondo College Grad photos at [Reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com).

## Río Hondo College Celebrates Graduates with Drive-through Ceremony

Río Hondo College's CARmencement drive-through graduation ceremony was recently featured on Reuters, highlighting the College's spotlight on graduates.



## Save the Date

### Now - Friday, August 20:

Open registration for Fall 2021 semester.

Link for info: <https://bit.ly/3a6Rj1L>

### Monday, June 21 and Tuesday, June 22:

Auditions for "Working!" the Musical.

Zoom code: 96938885253

### Wednesday, June 23:

Board of Trustees Study Session

### Saturday, August 21 - Saturday, December 11:

Full term dates for Fall 2021 semester

### Saturday, August 21 - Friday, October 15:

First half dates for Fall 2021 semester

### Saturday, October 16 - Saturday, December 11:

Second half dates for Fall 2021 semester



# Auditions!

Calling all Singers, Actors, Dancers and Crew for the Musical:

## WORKING! 2012 Version

Auditions are on June 21 and 22 from 6:30 to 9pm on zoom.

Zoom code: 96938885253

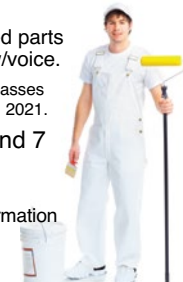
Auditions will consist of reading assigned parts from the script, movement and interview/voice.

This musical will be presented as part of the classes THTR 171 and 159 from June 21 to August 12, 2021.

Performances are on August 6 and 7

Musical Director Linda Brown  
Choreographer Venus Fields

Contact Director William Korf for more information at [wkorf@riohondo.edu](mailto:wkorf@riohondo.edu)



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