

# FOCUS ON RÍO

April 2022

## President's Message



**Teresa Dreyfuss**

Hello Río Hondo College community,

As graduation day approaches, I encourage our Río Hondo College students to consider the road ahead and how they choose to shape their future.

Earning a degree or a certificate will open doors to their professional or educational pathways. There will be much joy and celebration as they transfer to four-year universities or gain qualifications that lead to fulfilling careers.

This does not mean, however, that they are beyond the most difficult part of their journeys. As new graduates, they will continue to face obstacles – and it is those hardships that shape their future. I encourage them to continue on as I believe that all of them will succeed.

So, congratulations to our students. I hope they find time to celebrate and stay motivated during this next month, because while this graduation is a milestone - it is also yet another step on their way to greatness.

## Río Hondo College Receives ACLS/NEH Grant to Boost Anthropology and Humanities Programs

Río Hondo College's Mesoamerican Clay-Figurine Project received a \$157,000 grant from the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), which will improve classroom facilities, provide more learning materials and boost interest in arts and humanities.

The grant was awarded by ACLS through the Sustaining Public Engagement Grant Program, which is part of the Sustaining the Humanities through the American Rescue Plan (SHARP) initiative. The SHARP initiative was enacted to help the U.S. recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Río Hondo College's Mesoamerican Clay-Figurine Project is a teaching, research and community partnership project where students create clay figurines and narratives to represent



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## Río Hondo College Receives ACLS/NEH Grant to Boost Anthropology and Humanities Programs

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themselves, their cultures and families. The program is one of only 24 recipients of the grant, which will be disbursed over a 12-month period starting in Spring/Summer 2022.

Río Hondo College's Professor of Anthropology Santiago Andres Garcia, M.A. and Assistant Professor of Chicano/a/x Studies Dr. Lizette "Lucha" Arévalo said the grant will also help pay for teacher salaries, a student liaison, public engagement and boost the public knowledge of Indigenous people and cultural understanding.

"The Mesoamerican-Clay Figurine Project of Río Hondo College has been instrumental to understanding the Indigenous Mesoamerican ancestry and lifeways of our large Latinx population," Garcia said. "The money is also important because it gets students involved and excited about community work after a long two plus years of the pandemic. We are hoping that this program gets other faculty excited about the bridges that exist between students, health engagement, and communities outside of campus."

Garcia said the grant will pay for a full lineup of public activities for the next year, including three public educational meetings, a book reading event, and a post-COVID-19 human health and medicine symposium. It will also pay for an upgrade to an existing cultural art installation in room A205.



"The Mesoamerican Clay-Figurine Project is motivated by the social and educational injustices that students and teachers of color experience in the classroom, at home, and in the workplace," Garcia said.

The Mesoamerican Clay-Figurine Project has won various acknowledgements over the years, including a \$40,000 grant from the Mellon/ACLS Community College Fellowship in 2019, a \$10,000 grant from the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City and a \$4,500 grant from the HuMetricsHSS Community in 2022 to fund a new website. The project was also recognized by the American Studies Association with the Gloria E. Anzaldúa Award in 2015.

## College Updates

- During the April 13 Board of Trustees meeting, Dr. Marilyn Flores' contract as the new Superintendent/President of the College was approved for a duration of three years at \$324,606 annual salary, with the same cost-of-living adjustments provided to other educational administrators after January 1, 2023. Flores will also receive a tax shelter annuity of \$7,200 annually and allowances of \$500 per month for a vehicle and \$150 per month for a cell phone.
- On April 13, the Board of Trustees heard and approved the Equal Employment Opportunity Plan – which reflects the College's commitment to equal employment opportunities. The report outlined the demographics of the surrounding areas, student population, gender population, and hiring analysis.
- The Board of Trustees approved the following employment in closed session during the April 13 meeting.
  - Gabriela Negrete Perez, Project Manager, Educational Talent Search
  - Andrew Delgado, Facilities Manager

**RÍO IN THE NEWS:** Read more in the [Mid Valley News](#).

## Río Hondo College Selects Dr. Marilyn Flores as New Superintendent/President

Río Hondo College and the Board of Trustees has appointed Dr. Marilyn Flores as its new Superintendent/President to continue leading the College on the path of prosperity, achievement and success.

The Board unanimously appointed Flores on March 24. Flores will begin her tenure once contract negotiations are finalized and will succeed Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss, who will retire on June 30, 2022.

Flores is currently the vice president of academic affairs at Santiago Canyon College in Orange County and previously served as interim president for Santa Ana College.

Flores holds a master's degree in education from the University of California, Los Angeles as well as a Bachelor of Arts in liberal studies and doctorate of philosophy in institutional leadership and policy studies from the University of California, Riverside.

"I am thrilled and excited to serve as the next Superintendent/President of Río Hondo College," Flores said. "I firmly know that through the support of the Board of Trustees, the staff and administration, Río Hondo College will continue to thrive, excel and serve its community with excellence. I believe the work that I have done over the course of my career in community colleges has led me here to this College and this community. I could not be more excited to join you and serve our students."





# Río Hondo College Students Awarded “Big Time” at Soroptimist Ceremony

Soroptimist International of Whittier presented their Signature Awards Celebration Luncheon on April 12, where the majority of awardees were students from Río Hondo College Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS) and Cooperative Agencies Resources for Education (CARE).

The “Live Your Dream Awards” provides resources to single mothers, including access to education and training needed to reach their full potential and achieve economic empowerment. The honorees are current Río Hondo CARE students Rose Rivas, Janine Cottini, Magdalena Curiel, Teresa Ambriz and Mercedes Fuentes.

“The Ruth White Memorial Scholarship” honoree was Eliana Valdes, an alumna of Río Hondo College and senior secretary for EOPS/CARE.

“Soroptimist of Whittier Mentoring Scholarship” award honorees are former

Río Hondo College CARE students Oralia Alcorta, Valentina Higgins, Alexis Fierro, Dianka Lohay, Sofia Tortoleto and Heiddy Ussery. Also, in attendance to support the students and alumni were Superintendent/ President Teresa Dreyfuss, Vice President of Student Services Dr. Eric Dixon-Peters, Acting Dean of Student Success Heba Griffiths, and CARE Specialist Laura Verdugo along with faculty Angela Rhodes, Glenn Heap, and Tammy Camacho.



# Partners in Housing: Río Hondo and Whittier Work to Address Student Housing Needs

High on the hill above Whittier, Río Hondo College's academic buildings are framed by playing fields, a pool and tennis courts, all overlooking the park-like setting below. But that beauty comes at a cost. Over its 50-year history, the college has seen the surrounding Los Angeles area become one of the most expensive rental markets in the country. And those high housing costs have in turn led to a 48% increase over the last decade in the population that is either homeless or insecurely housed.

"A severe lack of affordable housing carries over to college students as well," explains Río Hondo Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss. "We mirror the city of Los Angeles, and our students are not exempt from the issues around them. In 2021, we had 346 students who needed transitional housing." That's far more than the 88 students who needed housing just two years ago, before the pandemic hit the community hard and wreaked havoc on employment, particularly in the service and hospitality industries.

Housing insecurity is a growing problem across California. The Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges has prioritized the development of student-centered basic needs infrastructure that includes a focus on student housing. The State of California is taking steps to ease the problem too, with a one-time \$2 billion investment in student housing, of which 50% (\$1 billion) over three years will be dedicated to increasing the stock of affordable student housing at California's community colleges.

Traditionally, Río Hondo has met the needs of its unhoused students by helping them apply for housing vouchers good for rental units or hotel rooms. The federal government subsidizes these rehousing vouchers, obtained through a third-party agency such as Jovenes Inc. Center, the Salvation Army, or Volunteers of America.

At the same time Río Hondo grappled with a four-fold increase in unhoused

students, neighboring Whittier College, a private four-year institution less than five miles away, watched the number of its students in residence drop once classes transitioned online. Now, a new partnership agreement between the schools promises to alleviate some of Río Hondo's need, offering unhoused students' space in the residence halls at Whittier. Whittier will accept the third-party voucher for the students it is able to accommodate. The partnership is set to continue until June 2026.

Río Hondo and Whittier have a long history of collaboration, says Río Hondo Board Vice President Vicky Santana. "Many of our students transfer to Whittier, and we jointly prepare students in social work and education."

"Housing is a basic, critical need that we all have, and we've found that when students have a stable, secure place to live, they do better in school," Santana continues. "Before, unhoused students often bounced around between relatives and friends, but the pandemic took away that option as people hunkered down and were reluctant to have others come in and out of their homes." Compounding the problem for students is that they typically lack credit, so it's difficult to get a lease even if they do have some means.

"I would like to thank Whittier College for making this partnership possible," President Dreyfuss said. Removing the anxiety and insecurity of their housing situation "means our students are able to focus on completing their educational goals."

Río Hondo's Board of Trustees has recently affirmed its 'passionate support' for social justice and equity, and the school takes that pledge very seriously.

"As a college, we have always done whatever we can to provide the basics that support our students," Santana said.

## Río Hondo College Hosts UndocuConference

Río Hondo College held its annual UndocuConference on April 20, bringing together legal and mental health experts for a presentation to assist students on their educational pathway. The event, held via Zoom, presented students with information about immigration, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), stress relief and on-campus support programs.

**CARECEN Staff at Río Hondo College / Personal de CARECEN en Río Hondo College**

Ana H. Ruygas, Attorney/Abogada  
Elizabeth Prudencia, Legal Assistant/Asistente Legal

**Take Care of Yourself**

- Gloria Hsiao, MEd, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, Brandon Heers, Marriage and Family Therapist
- Student Health & Psychological Services, Río Hondo College
- [www.BeingHappyinriverside.com](http://www.BeingHappyinriverside.com)

**Sources of Stress**

To name a few...

- Relationships
- Health
- School
- Work
- Money issues
- Change or transitions
- Pressure from self or others
- **limited prospects, greater financial burdens, a lack of support networks, and fear.**

## Will California Sidestep Federal ‘Work First’ Welfare Rules?

The first time April Acosta applied for cash assistance 18 years ago, the Baldwin Park mother of a 2-year-old thought it would help pull her out of a cycle of dead-end desk jobs.

She signed up for CalWORKs, the state’s cash aid program for low-income adults with children, hoping she could enroll in community college, get a degree and leave the medical referral office where she had developed carpal tunnel syndrome.

Instead of pointing her toward school, a Los Angeles County case worker handed her a list of places to get a new job and said that if she didn’t land one, her CalWORKs benefits would be cut.

She continued taking jobs, off and on, that would have met the program’s requirements, but they didn’t help her get ahead. They were a patchwork of “lower-end,” often temporary office jobs, answering phones and filing papers. Now at 51 she says she has rarely made much above minimum wage.

“It felt like being forced,” she said about that first encounter with CalWORKs. “It was like trying to get me to work more than anything else. It wasn’t a career.”

For a quarter of a century, the “work first” welfare model that Acosta and many other people experience has defined California’s cash assistance program. Work requirements were the pillar of the 1996 federal welfare reforms that President Bill Clinton signed into law and that states have been pushed to enforce ever since.

But advocates for the poor and many policy experts have long criticized the federal rules as rigid, punitive and born out of racist tropes about Black single mothers abusing welfare. They say it sometimes hurts those it’s supposed to help.

Some state officials and advocates are trying to change that, but there are challenges.

“The current program is really just focused on: can you get people into jobs as much as possible. Everything else is secondary,” said Esi Hutchful, policy analyst at the California Budget and Policy Center, which advocates for low-income Californians.

Recently she enrolled at Río Hondo College to pursue an associate’s degree in business administration. This time her schooling counts toward her CalWORKs hours.

“I don’t want to be stuck here again,” she said about receiving welfare. “I could have gone to college a long time ago if they had let me do what I had to do.”

Breanne Holland, who leads a department at American River College in Sacramento that helps students who receive CalWORKs benefits, said a student’s case recently was reviewed and his county social worker pressured him to spend a month meeting federal work requirements rather than the state ones. He ended up dropping out of a class.

“It negatively impacted that student’s academic journey,” Holland said.

Since the pandemic, California has sought waivers from the federal government to temporarily allow officials to avoid penalties for not meeting the work requirement.

And Arambula, who chairs a budget subcommittee on health and human services, said in a hearing he may want to permanently shield county departments from such penalties.

A group of advocates convened by the state to recommend changes to CalWORKs argues that it’s worth the risk.

“While the penalty is hanging out there, it’s difficult if not impossible to go all in” on program changes, said Cathy Senderling-McDonald, director of the County Welfare Directors Association.

It’s not clear if the Newsom administration would back that change. When asked for comment, Theresa Mier, spokeswoman of the California Department of Social Services, noted that the proposal came from advocates, not the department.

During the hearing, state Department of Finance analyst Jenean Docter pointed to other changes in the welfare system, including additional case management hours and racial equity training for caseworkers.

But the work rate, she said, remains an “inherent feature” of the federal welfare program that is still a shared liability between the state and the counties.



## Río Hondo College Hosts Black Scholars Program Event

The Black Scholars Program held an in-person and virtual event on April 14 to discuss a variety of topics focused on boosting the success of African-American and Black Río Hondo College students.

The event covered topics such as mentorship, challenges in achieving educational and career goals, recommendations for Black students to achieve success and the importance of family, friends, mentors and community.

Panelists included the Vice President of Student Services Dr. Earic Dixon-Peters, Vice President of Finance and Business Stephen Kibui and Dean of Kinesiology, Dance and Athletics Nedra Brown.

# Río Hondo College Accreditation Visit Summary Yields Positive Results

Río Hondo College underwent a comprehensive accreditation visit from March 14 to 17, during which a peer review team reviewed the College's institutional self-evaluation report and evidence and interviewed a number of faculty, staff, and students. Overall, the visit was quite positive, with the peer review team concluding that Río Hondo College is a very good college.

Institutionally, the peer review team was impressed by the College's mission; in the exit report, the team indicated that they "applaud the courage and commitment found in the newly adopted mission statement," and further that the fulfillment of the Río Hondo College mission "is found across campus through your commitment to supporting students during the pandemic, your investment in basic needs funding, your support of student parents, and your overall commitment to student success."

The peer review team also acknowledged the faculty's commitment to professional development, which they noted exceeds that of other colleges, the active role of the Academic Senate in program mapping for Guided Pathways, and the de-escalation training in the law enforcement program as an example of

support to the local community. The team also specifically recognized the work and commitment of Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss for her steady guidance during the pandemic and her more than three decades of service to the College.

The team also commended the College for its Bachelor of Science in Automotive Technology and as well as the College's efforts in providing students with timely, useful, and accurate information about relevant academic requirements in the form of educational plans for students.

The College received only two recommendations from the team. The first is to include student learning outcomes on officially approved course outlines and ensure that students receive, in every class, a syllabus that lists these outcomes. The second is to enhance tracking of faculty and administrator evaluations to ensure all personnel are evaluated systematically and at stated intervals.

Río Hondo College is actively taking steps to address the recommendations stated above, and is awaiting the Commission Action, which will occur June 1 to 3.

## A Taste of Río Returns to Río Hondo College

### WHAT:

Río Hondo College will host the return of its popular and lively A Taste of Río event – which invites guests onto campus for an evening of delicious foods, fine wines and craft beers, live entertainment and a silent auction.

This will be the first A Taste of Río event since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

The event, which was created by the Río Hondo College Foundation, raises funds for scholarships to support students in achieving their educational goals. Presale tickets will be \$75 for general admission and \$125 for VIP passes.

### WHEN:

6 p.m. Friday, June 17.  
VIP preview begins at 5 p.m.

### WHERE:

3600 Workman Mill Road, Whittier, CA 90601

### DETAILS:

Tickets will be available from April 1 – May 31 only and will not be available for purchase the day of the event. To purchase tickets online by May 31 and to learn more about A Taste of Río, visit <https://gorio.page/atasteofrio>.



## Río Hondo College to Host Art Exhibition, "Through the Empyrean"

### WHAT:

Río Hondo College Art Gallery has unveiled its latest exhibition "Through the Empyrean," which features the work of Ada Pullini Brown. The exhibit is curated by Gallery Director Robert Miller.

The exhibition features a series of sky paintings that were created during the COVID-19 pandemic. Brown's work is meant to depict the loss of freedom and enforced isolationism resulting from the last two years of COVID-prompted closures.

### WHEN:

Gallery hours: 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., Monday through Thursday or by appointment, through May 17.

### WHERE:

3600 Workman Mill Road, B-14, Whittier CA, 90601.  
Free parking in lot C.

### DETAILS:

For more information, contact Robert Miller at [Robert.miller@rioondo.edu](mailto:Robert.miller@rioondo.edu).

## 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 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.



## Río Hondo College to Offer Study Abroad Program in Madrid, Spain

### WHAT:

Río Hondo College students will have the opportunity to expand their horizons through the study abroad program, which will send students enrolled in 12 or more units to Madrid, Spain during the 2023 spring semester.

Study abroad students will enroll in general education classes, taught by faculty from Río Hondo College, Citrus College and Cuyamaca College and will live alongside students from eleven other local California community colleges.

### WHEN:

Feb. 16, 2023 – May 13, 2023

### WHERE:

Madrid, Spain

### DETAILS:

For more information, please contact Professor Rebecca Green at [rgreen@riohondo.edu](mailto:rgreen@riohondo.edu).



## Save the Date

**Thursday, April 7 – Tuesday, May 17:**

"Through the Emphyrean" art exhibition

**Saturday, January 29 – Thursday, May 26:**

Spring Semester 2022

**Saturday, May 21 – Thursday, May 26:**

Finals week

**10 am, Friday, May 27:**

Commencement Ceremony

**Monday, May 30:**

Memorial Day – campus closed

**Wednesday, June 8:**

Regular Board of Trustees Meeting

**6 p.m. Friday, June 17:**

A Taste of Río Fundraising event

**Monday, June 19:**

Juneteenth – campus closed