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3600 Workman Mill Road / Whittier, CA 90601

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CONTACT: Ruthie Retana
(562) 463-3145

Rio Hondo College Receives Space Grant to Inspire Student Interest in STEM-related Majors

WHITTIER – Rio Hondo College has been selected to receive a NASA-sponsored California Space Grant that will provide 12 students with hands-on instruction in science, technology, engineering and math as a way of boosting their interest in STEM fields and raising academic performance.

The competitive grant from the California Space Grant Consortium, announced Jan. 30, brings the College \$6,000 for student scholarships, \$500 for purchasing electronic kits, \$500 for additional electronic assembly equipment and \$500 for faculty mentor awards.

In addition, the consortium will fund a one-day trip to either NASA's Armstrong Flight Research Center or the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, and will host online webinars on research topics that highlight the work of each national NASA center.

"This grant award testifies to Rio Hondo College's commitment to providing STEM opportunities to our students," Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss said. "Often, the first-time college students who constitute a large share of Rio Hondo's student body miss out on these types of opportunities in high school, and this program will help them learn whether a STEM career is the right path for them."

Rio Hondo College participated in a pilot program for the grant in 2013-14 and 2014-15, with 24 students receiving similar training and NASA-related experiences.

The new program will include a faculty team of two mathematicians and a physicist/physical chemist. The faculty members have backgrounds in robotics coding, including Arduino electronics/robotics kits, and have conducted projects analyzing rocket launch data.

MORE

Rio Hondo College, located in Whittier, California, 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. For information on the College or its programs, please call 562-692-0921 or visit www.riohondo.edu.

Students are recruited from Pre-Calculus or Calculus 1 classes, when they are often not yet committed to a STEM major. They will work in teams on programming tasks on Friday afternoons through the end of March and then on project development. Projects will be completed in summer when lighter class loads will allow students to immerse themselves in the effort.

Rio Hondo College leaders say they expect the program to help improve student performance in their academic pursuits.

Rio Hondo College has a longstanding commitment to inspiring interest in STEM fields among its student body, which includes a high number of first-generation college students, students from low-income families and underrepresented minorities.

Since 2008, the College has offered a mathematics, engineering and science achievement (MESA) program that is designed to increase the number of these students who transfer to four-year institutions in STEM majors. In 2009, the College added the federal TRIO Student Support Services STEM program.

Together, the programs have increased enrollment in STEM major preparation classes by more than 100 percent.

“Rio Hondo College is committed to ensuring all of its students can pursue opportunities for cutting-edge careers and college programs,” Board of Trustees President Norma Edith Garcia said. “This grant opens another door to those opportunities.”

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