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Rio Hondo College Receives National Science Foundation Funding to Design Alternative Fuels Technician Safety Certification Program

WHITTIER – Rio Hondo College is collaborating with Central Oregon Community College on a \$778,000, three-year National Science Foundation (NSF) project as part of its Advanced Technological Education (ATE) program to develop a safety certification program for technicians who work on electric and fuel cell vehicles.

The NSF/ATE funding, awarded July 28, is the second received by Rio Hondo College's innovative Alternative Fuels Technology Program, a leader in training students and industry technicians to work on alternative fuels vehicles.

"There's tremendous demand from the industry for technicians capable of working on high-voltage vehicles," said Professor John Frala, who heads Rio Hondo College's Alternative Fuels program. "This is a national safety certification project – together with Central Oregon, we're the only ones taking on this challenge."

The two colleges will meet in August to establish a timeline for the project, which will likely include setting up a classroom at each college to beta-test developed concepts with collaboration from industry experts.

Frala said Rio Hondo College has strong industry support for the effort from companies such as Toyota, Ford, GM, Honda, Tesla, Proterra, as well as large transit fleets across the U.S. Proterra, which builds electric buses in the region, will likely allow the colleges to use its resources for testing and certifying technicians.

This funding builds on other training programs developed by Rio Hondo College in partnership with the Southern California Transit Training Consortium (SCR TTC).

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.

In 2015, Rio Hondo College received \$200,000 from the NSF/ATE for a three-year project to create and evaluate work-based training tools for alternative-fuels technology students. That grant led Rio Hondo College to create an Associate of Science degree in Electric/Fuel Cell Vehicle Technology that graduated five students with AS degrees and 10 students with Certificates of Achievements in May.

These 15 students were immediately hired by Proterra, Tesla, Jaguar, Land Rover, LA Metro, and Toyota.

“They went right from Rio Hondo College into jobs paying \$22 or more an hour. As a result of the NSF/ATE funded projects and the quick job placements, word is getting out about the strength of Rio Hondo College’s alternative fuels program,” Frala said.

Rio Hondo College President/Superintendent Teresa Dreyfuss praised Frala for his leadership.

“John is a pioneer in the field of alternative fuels. His innovative approach and forward-thinking attitude draws opportunities like this that benefit our students and community,” Dreyfuss said.

Frala is a member of the state’s Green Team, an advisory group dedicated to creating a series of hydrogen refueling stations known as the California Hydrogen Highway.

Rio Hondo College also offers a four-year Bachelor of Science Degree in automotive technology as part of a California pilot program allowing community colleges to offer baccalaureate degrees. Rio Hondo is one of only 13 Community Colleges approved in the state. This year, the program’s second cohort of students will begin studies.

“It’s exciting to see Rio Hondo College take a lead role not only in providing our students with extraordinary career tech opportunities, but to actually develop the industry standard for programs that will likely be used by colleges across the nation,” Board of Trustees President Norma Edith Garcia said.

The National Science Foundation (NSF) is an independent federal agency that supports fundamental research and education across all fields of science and engineering. In fiscal year 2017, its budget is \$7.5 billion. NSF funds reach all 50 states through grants to nearly 2,000 colleges, universities and other institutions. Each year, NSF receives more than 48,000 competitive proposals for funding and makes about 12,000 new funding awards.

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