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Río Hondo College to Celebrate 50th Anniversary for Program Offering Support to Disadvantaged Students

WHITTIER – Río Hondo College’s Extended Opportunity Programs & Services (EOP&S) will hold a 50th anniversary celebration from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 14 at the Campus Inn for the program that helps historically underrepresented college students achieve their educational goals.

EOP&S, launched by Senate Bill 164 in 1969 as part of the Civil Rights Movement, is considered the original equity program of the California Community Colleges. It provides academic, financial and personal support for low-income students whose educational and socio-economic situations might otherwise prevent them from achieving their higher education goals.

“EOP&S plays a truly remarkable role in helping to ensure all students are guaranteed an equal opportunity to succeed,” Superintendent/ President Dr. Arturo Reyes said. “The staff are dedicated to breaking down the barriers too often faced by the most disadvantaged sectors of our community.”

The celebration will recognize the legacy and impact of EOP&S, featuring speeches from Dr. Reyes, alumni and current students, and former EOP&S Director Dr. Manuel Baca. Festivities will include music, lunch, a photo booth and EOP&S swag items to mark the milestone.

“Tens of thousands of students and their family members have benefitted tremendously in having EOP&S as a significant part of their lives,” Baca said. “Today, EOP&S continues to deliver on the promise and commitment made 50 years ago.”

Río Hondo Colleges’ EOP&S program is the eighth-largest in the California Community Colleges system, serving 1,731 students in 2018-19 alone with \$750,000 in direct support, including book and meal vouchers and educational supplies.

“EOP&S has been like a second family,” sociology major Sarah Serrano said. “They have always been there for me; whether I come in to get a scantron for a test last minute or need someone to talk to, they have never let me down.”

Río 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.

The program's services include specialized counseling, priority registration, transfer advising, career assessments, financial aid assistance, and loans of laptops, voice recorders and calculators. The program fielded more than 11,002 student office visits in 2018-19, with students served posting a 90 percent retention rate and earning 194 degrees.

EOP&S has been a catalyst in creating the first transfer centers with resources to provide students the opportunity to research and transfer to different universities. Tutoring is another resource that stems from EOP&S with the understanding that under-prepared students can drastically benefit from learning assistance programs.

"I serve with the most dedicated staff and faculty who share the same passion in helping our students," Río Hondo College EOP&S Director Heba Griffiths said. "We provide countless resources to them on a daily basis, but most importantly we offer them hope. We help empower them to believe in themselves no matter their challenges and also help them understand that these challenges are part of their testimony as they move forward toward completing their educational goals."

Griffiths also serves as the Director of Cooperative Agencies Resources for Education (CARE), established in 1982 as a supplemental element to EOP&S. CARE is designed to provide educational support services to individuals who are the single head of household with the training and skills needed to find employment and be self-sufficient.