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Río Hondo College Partners with MIT to Inspire New Wave of Inventors During Summer Program

WHITTIER – Students from Río Hondo College and local high schools created innovative solutions to modern problems, such as using drones for campus security to report suspicious activity or adapting smart textiles to chairs to fix poor posture in office workers, during the College’s inaugural Bridge to Invention Río program.

The program, which ran from July 17 to 28, was created in partnership with Lemelson-MIT (LMIT) to guide students through the disciplines of business and engineering to create and present a product, web app or service. The program was made available at no cost to all college students and local high school juniors and seniors.

“Getting to work with MIT is amazing because you don’t think to get that opportunity at a community college level and it makes the world feel more accessible,” Río Hondo College physics major Elisa Ruvalcaba said.

Ruvalcaba and her team created an underground watering system to reduce California’s water waste by 25%. She said she was encouraged to solve the problem due to the state’s longstanding drought.

“Organizationally, Río Hondo College has been an incredible partner who has been willing to take risks and learn in such a new field that requires an institution to be agile,” LMIT Invention Education Manager Cristina Sáenz said. “I cannot say enough about the students. It is mind-blowing to see the dedication and grit from each of our students. Their passion for identifying problems to help those in their community is incredible.”

Funding for the summer program was made possible through the Title V HSI grant, or Communities Uniting to Model and Build Regional Entrepreneurial Success (CUMBRES), a federal grant created for Hispanic-serving institutions. The program was led by Río Hondo College’s Assistant Professor of Business Eric Caesar, Engineering Professor Jenny Ding, and LMIT Invention Education Administrators Evelyn Gomez and Sáenz.

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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. For information on the College or its programs, please call 562-692-0921 or visit www.riohondo.edu.

At the conclusion of the program, each team presented their project and each student received an award of completion.

“The power to innovate is one of the most important skills a person can have, and one that Río Hondo College aims to develop in the next generation of inventors and problem solvers,” Superintendent/President Dr. Marilyn Flores said. “We are immensely proud of our partnership with Lemelson-MIT. Not many community college students can say they have trained with MIT professionals, but here at Río Hondo College, we provide that opportunity because we know the importance of their insight.”

According to Caesar and Ding, the goal is to use the information gathered during the summer program to create new courses and academic programs in social entrepreneurship based on LMIT’s invention education curriculum by fall 2024. The College hopes to welcome LMIT back for another two-week program in the future and expand it to include majors such as communications and art.

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

INVENTION1: The inaugural Bridge to Invention Río program class ran from July 17 to 28 in partnership with Lemelson-MIT to guide students through the disciplines of business and engineering to create and present a product, web app or service to encourage the next wave of inventors and innovators.

INVENTION2: Río Hondo College physics major Elisa Ruvalcaba presents her group’s idea for an underground watering system to reduce California’s water waste by 25%. Ruvalcaba and 20 other students were part of the Bridge to Invention Río program, which focused on teaching business and engineering skills.

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