

PRESS RELEASE

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Pomona Students Explore Health Care Professions

PUSD, Universities Partner to Host Innovative Forensics Academy

POMONA, Calif. – More than 400 students and their parents from Pomona Unified and throughout the region delved into the world of forensics and infectious diseases, explored an anatomy lab and learned investigative procedures from the Pomona Police Department as part of the Pomona Health Career Ladder, a pipeline that fosters Pomona youths' education and aspirations to become medical and health care professionals.

Now in its sixth year, the Pomona Health Career Ladder is a partnership between PUSD, Cal Poly Pomona, California State University, Fullerton and Western University of Health Sciences (WesternU), which hosts monthly Saturday academies for sixth- through 12th-grade PUSD students.

The "Forensic Science and Infectious Disease" Saturday workshop, held Oct. 25, provided middle school students the opportunity to learn investigative procedures from WesternU health professions students while high school students explored real medical specimens in guided interactions. To wrap up the academy, all students learned about real-life crime scene investigation from the Pomona Police Department as they toured the Pomona CSI vehicle.

"The Health Career Ladder is an innovative partnership that provides our students the opportunity to be exposed to the variety of health care professions available at an early age, as well as develop the skills and gain the tools necessary to attain their full academic potential and pursue these careers," said Fernando Meza, Administrative Director of Pupil and Community Services.

The family-oriented and academic enrichment event, the second in a series, included a performance by the Garey High School Choir, directed by Rafael Duran, and multiple hands-on workshops for students led by dozens of medical, dental, pharmacy and veterinary student volunteers from the three universities.

The program also included presentations by Dr. Maryam Othman, Director of WesternU's Division of Global and Community Health, College of Osteopathic Medicine of the Pacific (COMP); Dr. Vicki Wedel, Forensic Anthropologist and Associate Professor of Anatomy at COMP and the College of Dental Medicine.

To encourage family involvement and encouragement, the program included a component in which parents learned about WesternU's many community outreach efforts and how to encourage their children to achieve their goals.

"Partnering with parents is critical to helping young students succeed," said Dr. Elizabeth Rega, WesternU's Associate Vice Provost for Academic Development. "Despite economic, educational and language obstacles, these parents have dedicated themselves to a better career for their children."

According to WesternU's Office of Institutional Research & Effectiveness, students who attend Health Career Ladder-sponsored events show significantly better school attendance, achieve higher scores on state standardized tests in English language arts and math, and earn higher GPAs compared with their peers.

With WesternU students serving as mentors and role models, the young medical scholars are able to develop a passion for science and health and learn about prospective careers, Superintendent Richard Martinez said.

"Through this pioneering partnership, we have been able to provide our students with engaging and academically stimulating programs that encourage their pursuit of higher education and allow them to explore the possibilities," Martinez said. "It is my hope that these students, no matter what careers they choose, will return to invest in the Pomona community and be a voice for PUSD."

Future workshops scheduled include: cardiovascular/diabetes (Nov. 15); disability (Dec. 13); disaster preparedness (Jan. 31); and emergency drills (March 7). An end-of-year awards ceremony and celebration will take place April 25, 2015.

Simultaneous Spanish translation for parents is provided at each event by Carlos Mendez, M.B.A.

More information on the program and workshops is available at: www.westernu.edu/ladder-pomona.

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

PHCL1: More than 400 students and their parents from Pomona Unified and throughout the region delved into the world of forensics and infectious diseases during a forensics academy at the Western University of Health Sciences campus on Oct. 25, 2014. **(Photo Courtesy of Jeff Malet, WesternU)**

PHCL2: High School Biomedical Scholars explore guided displays of human anatomy as part of the Pomona Health Career Ladder's Forensics Academy at the Western University of Health Sciences campus on Oct. 25, 2014. **(Photo Courtesy of Jeff Malet, WesternU)**

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