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Rio Hondo College Students Raising Bar for Degrees for Transfer, Law School Program

WHITTIER – An estimated 1,372 students will be eligible to receive a record-breaking 1,646 associate degrees at Rio Hondo College’s 53th Commencement on Thursday, May 26, a surge driven by a massive leap in degrees guaranteeing enrollment in the California State University system.

Overall, degree numbers grew 42 percent from 2014-15, reflecting a six-year trend of achievement that has seen degree numbers steadily climb from 784 in 2010-11.

Degrees for transfer are expected to hit 666 this year, more than double the 298 awarded in 2014-15. The degrees represent 40.5 percent degrees earned at Rio Hondo College, up from 25.6 percent in 2014-15 and 8.6 percent in 2013-14.

“Every year brings exciting new accomplishments by our dedicated students,” Rio Hondo College Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss said. “This year will cap all that have come before as we honor these students for putting so much hard work into achieving their goals. It really is a tremendous accomplishment.”

The May 26 commencement ceremony will also honor 14 students graduating as part of the first Pathway to Law School cohort. The students completed additional classes, engaged in special programs and secured internships to prepare for further legal education and careers in law.

Rio Hondo College is one of 24 community colleges in the program, sponsored by the State Bar Council on Access and Fairness. The program aims to help under-represented minorities and first-time students complete their educations at four-year universities and attend a top California law school.

The students will continue their studies at private and public universities that range from UCLA and UC Berkeley to University of La Verne and Cal Poly Pomona.

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.

Although students in Rio Hondo College's Fire Academy and Police Academy graduated in their own ceremonies earlier this year, Thursday's program will include 180 students earning associate degrees in public safety fields as well as students from the College's well-regarded nursing program.

Some 75 students will receive associate's degrees in nursing, including 26 who will transition into jobs at Whittier Hospital and Anaheim Regional Medical Center. Eleven students will receive associate's degrees in vocational nursing and 19 will earn vocational nursing certificates. Seventy students will receive certificates in nursing assistant programs, including acute care.

In addition, 25 students will continue nursing studies at Cal State Los Angeles and Azusa Pacific University, partner schools with Rio Hondo College that offer Bachelor of Nursing Science programs.

"There is no experience quite as thrilling as a commencement ceremony," said Board of Trustees President Mary Ann Pacheco, a Rio Hondo professor for 38 years before she joined the governing board.

"We see the full impact of the College's ability to help members of our community realize their dreams, to see the role played by our dedicated faculty, staff and administrators take solid form right before our eyes. It's incredibly moving," Pacheco said.

Other highlights of the ceremony include:

- Welcome remarks from President Dreyfuss
- Pledge of Allegiance led by Student Trustee Melissa De Leon
- National Anthem sung by the Rio Hondo Choir
- Keynote address from Dunia Elvir, anchor for Noticiero Telemundo 52's 5 a.m. and 6 a.m. broadcasts. Elvir received a Golden Mike for investigative reporting, an Emmy Award and a GLAAD Media Award. She has been named one of the 13 most outstanding Latinos in the U.S. by the National Association of Latino Leaders.
- Remarks by William Ashby, the president of the Associated Students of Rio Hondo College. Ashby, a returning student, is known for his passionate advocacy of Rio Hondo on social media and at school events. Ashby was a foster child and high school dropout who decided to pursue a college degree after the birth of his son. He will continue his education at Cal State Fullerton.
- Announcement of students chosen for "Profiles of Student Success" honors for overcoming adversity en route to earning degrees by Vice President of Student Services Henry Gee.
- Awarding of the Marie I. Pellissier Award to valedictorian Maritza J. Acuna Gaxiola by Academic Senate President Robert Bethel. Gaxiola also has been recognized nationally for helping lead Rio Hondo College women's soccer team to the state finals.
- Presentation of emeritus professor of economics and sociology Maurice Meysenburg as a Fellow of the College by Board of Trustees President Pacheco. Pacheco was named a Fellow of the College in 2012.

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