

# PRESIDENT'S UPDATE

COVERING JANUARY 2016



## President's Message



Teresa Dreyfuss

January found Rio Hondo College abuzz with instruction through our highly popular winter intersession even as we prepared for the arrival of students for spring semester. As we cross the mid-year boundary of the academic calendar, we continue to see significant evidence of Rio Hondo's commitment to community all across campus.

Consider, for example, Spanish Professor Mariano Zaro, who exemplifies the depth and range of our faculty. Dr. Zaro, a poet of

considerable standing, helps showcase the Los Angeles region's literary talents through a video interview series he has hosted for more than five years. He is also an advocate for the arts in our surrounding communities, seeking to provide new opportunities for literary exploration.

Dr. Zaro's efforts echo the chord of community connection evident in other Rio Hondo endeavors, including our recent breakfast for high school counselors and upcoming programs for helping residents with income tax filing and applications for higher education financial aid.

It's a collection of efforts and ideals that goes to the core of our mission at Rio Hondo College and celebrates our strengths.

## Forensics Team Competes on National Stage

Rio Hondo College's Forensics Speech and Debate Team recently returned from the highly competitive Mile High Swing Tournament at the University of Utah, providing a chance for students to challenge national level speakers in two individual and two team contests, as well as to connect with recent Rio Hondo transfers.

The swing competition – a term used when multiple contests are staged together – ran from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. daily, with Rio Hondo's students winning rounds against some of the highest-ranked colleges in the nation.

"As tournaments go, this is a particularly tough tournament both from level of the competition and schedule of the events," Rio Hondo College debate coach Grant Tovmasian said. Although we did not win any awards, the realization that Rio Hondo students can face the toughest competition in the nation and prove that they belong there is a victory in it itself."

Rio Hondo College debate competitors were: Samantha Recinos, Chris Voivedich, Felix Rodriguez, Patricia Hughes and Victor Wright.

This is the second year Rio Hondo participated in the tournament hosted by the University of Utah, which ranked in the top 10 nationally for debate in 2014 and 2015. Making the trip especially interesting was the chance for local students to connect with five teammates who transferred in 2014-15 to Utah: Daniel Ybarra, Caesar Sanchez, Juan Guerrero, Kimberly Valencia and Alex Cadena.

"The reason why we transferred five of our Speech and Debate students last year to Utah is because the visit to U of U gave them the opportunity to expand their horizons past what is traditional. And it seems they are loving the choice. The entire coaching staff at Utah expressed their thanks to Rio Hondo and stated that they will accept all students who want to transfer to their university if they resemble the ones they already accepted," Tovmasian said.

Students interested in joining the team, should contact Tovmasian at [gtovmasian@riohondo.edu](mailto:gtovmasian@riohondo.edu) and enroll in Speech 110, which trains students in debate. Team lectures and practices are held in room A222.



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## Board Update

Rio Hondo College Board of Trustees members received a briefing during their January meeting on the 2015 scorecard used to track the success of students in six-year cohorts.

The report for 2013-14, available for review online, shows a steady increase in the size of the cohort tracked from 1,752 students in 2004-05 to 2,152 in 2008-09. At the same time, the percent of students who were prepared for college who obtained degrees rose from 59.3 percent to 62.4 percent.

Still, College leaders advised caution in reviewing the numbers, given the length of time tracked. A multitude of student support efforts have been launched in the last few years; their impact on the six-year cohorts thus far has been muted.

Also during the meeting, trustees appointed several interim administrators, including Dr. JoAnna Downey-Schilling as interim vice president, academic affairs; Beth Brousseau as interim director of the Child Development Center and Bruce A. Noble as project grant manager and deputy sector navigator for the College's energy grant.

This will be a second stint in the interim post Schilling, who held the interim job in 2011, before joining Cerritos College as vice president/assistant superintendent of academic affairs in 2012. She served as Rio Hondo College's dean of arts and cultural programs from 2006-11. She is an author, a former college theater instructor and playwright.

Schilling earned her Ph.D. in education from Oregon State University in 2011, her Master of Fine Arts in theater from Carnegie Mellon University in 1996 and a B.A. in English from Smith College, where she graduated magna cum laude in 1988.

## Career & Technical Education Division Hosts Open House

Prospective students can meet faculty and current students, learn about enrollment, tour labs and view demonstrations during Rio Hondo's Career and Technical Division Open House from 8:30 a.m. to noon Saturday, Feb. 27 at the College's Tech Quad.

Topics covers will include the College's new Bachelor of Science in automotive technology, and programs in alternative fuels, alternative energy, architecture, civil design technology, electronics, engineering design and drafting, geographic information systems, heavy equipment technology, landscape architecture and welding.

To register or obtain information, email [CTEDivision@riohondo.edu](mailto:CTEDivision@riohondo.edu) or call 562-273-2170 or 562-463-3213.

## Third Annual Regional Counselor Breakfast Highlights RHC Opportunities, Services



Rio Hondo College hosted about 100 counselors from 28 area high schools on Jan. 22 for its third annual Regional High School Counselors Breakfast and a program fair highlighting student support services.

Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss welcomed guests to the energy-filled event and Associated Students of Rio Hondo College Vice President Juan Castellanos shared the story of how Rio Hondo helped him on his higher education path.

Castellanos attended El Monte High School and Ledesma Continuation High School – where he said he received his second chance at education.

Rio Hondo College offered him his third chance, he said. He praised the College outreach team for connecting with him, and faculty, staff and administrators for helping him feel at home. In addition to exploring his leadership skills, Castellanos has made the Dean's List at Rio Hondo, earning a 4.0 GPA.

This event included discussion of the College's academic programs, including the Common Assessment initiative aimed at California's community colleges and how high school transcripts will play a role among other measures in placing students in English and math classes.

Counselors also toured the College's Career and Technical Education facilities and Automotive Technology Department, which is launching a four-year Bachelor of Science degree as part of a historic state pilot program.

The breakfast was a prelude to the annual Senior Preview Days scheduled for Feb. 23-24, when hundreds of local high school seniors will visit the College.



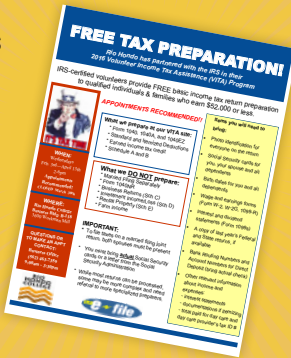
## Students Provide Free Tax Filing Assistance

IRS-certified students from Rio Hondo College are providing free basic income tax return preparation for individuals and families who earned \$52,000 or less in 2015 as part of the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program.

The program will run from 2 to 6 p.m. Wednesdays through April 13, excluding March 30, from the Business building.

Volunteers will help prepare Form 1040, 1040A and 1040EZ, including standard and itemized deductions, earned income tax credit and Schedules A and B. Call (562) 463-7359 between 9 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. for appointments or to ask questions.

Last year, 30 students and two faculty volunteers processed more than 248 returns, \$430,000 in refunds and \$240,000 in education credits. The estimated savings in tax preparation fees was estimated at more than \$67,000.



## Spanish Professor Brings Poet's Perspective to Literary Video Interview Series



Ask Mariano Zaro why he interviews Southern California's most celebrated poets and he'll tell you it's because he's selfish.

"It's fascinating. Every poet has a different past, a different history, but at the same time they have a lot of things in common," says Zaro, a Spanish professor at Rio Hondo College and author of four noted books of poetry. "I want to talk to these people, to learn everything I can about them, their writing and the community that inspires them."

Zaro explores the local literary landscape through *Poetry.LA*, a collaborative that showcases the work of the region's talented writers. In just over three years, he has hosted 25 video interviews, including his most recent one with L.A.'s poet laureate, Luis J. Rodriguez.

Zaro, who joined Rio Hondo College as a part-time professor 10 years ago and began teaching full time five years ago, is known for writing poems that mirror the meaningful moments of his life – some painful, some uplifting, all powerful.

Poetry, he says, is driven not by a person's hope of sounding smart, trendy or even socially passionate. It requires courage.

"Writing poetry is very daring. You feel very exposed. And very vulnerable. But that is at the same time the power of poetry. People react to that nakedness."

In addition to his writing and interviewing, Zaro brings his perspectives on poetry to Rio Hondo College's Creative Writing Club, which meets at 1 p.m. Thursdays at the Learning Resource Center. He would like to see students at Rio Hondo connect their literary efforts to the greater community, including more poetry readings and workshops in neighboring cities.

"What I would like to see happen is for the students who are in the poetry classes, the writing classes and the writing club, to take that experience to the community where they live," he said. "Many young students write ... they have a creative desire. I think we need more space for that creativity to happen and to be enjoyed by other people."

## Fuel Cell Vehicle Offers Hands-on Training

Students in Rio Hondo College's groundbreaking alternative fuels program received a chance in early February to explore a Toyota Mirai, one of the first hydrogen fuel-cell vehicles to be sold commercially.

The car, which retails at \$57,500, can travel about 300 miles on a full charge of hydrogen, a fuel technology that is just beginning to come into its own as an alternative to petroleum, electric and hybrid technologies.

The Mirai's powertrain has no moving parts, weighs less than a hybrid and generates a smaller carbon footprint. Hydrogen has no global warming properties (GWP) to harm the climate.

"This is a tremendous teaching tool for the students in our alternative fuels program," said Rio Hondo Professor John Frala, an alternative fuels expert. "It goes beyond the classroom to give them a real feel for what this technology can do. They can touch it, climb in it, examine how it works."

Frala is a member of California's Green Team, an advisory group dedicated to creating a series of hydrogen refueling stations known as the California Hydrogen Highway. He worked with the California Fuel Cell Partnership to secure the car as a teaching tool for students in Rio Hondo College's alternative fuels Associate of Science degree for Transfer (AS-T) program launched in fall 2000.



# Observatory Announces Spring Viewing Dates

Rio Hondo College has announced the dates for free star and planet gazing in its spring viewing program at the Gordon D. Crowell Astrophysical Observatory, home to one of the largest telescopes available to the public throughout Southern California.

The schedule of Friday viewings runs 7 p.m. Feb. 26, March 4 and 11, and 8 p.m. April 8, 15, 29, May 6 and 13.

Guests should arrive 15 to 20 minutes early and park in Lot C, in front of the Child Development Center. The walk to the observatory is about half a mile uphill. Flashlights are not required.

Viewing is contingent on clear weather.

## Connect with Us on Social Media



**RHCRoadrunners**



**RioHondo\_College**



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**#iLoveRioHondo**



**bit.do/riohondocollege**

## Serving the communities of

- El Monte
- Santa Fe Springs
- South El Monte
- Whittier
- Pico Rivera

### and portions of:

- Norwalk
- East Whittier\*
- Downey
- South Whittier\*
- La Mirada
- West Whittier\*
- City of Industry
- Avocado Heights\*
- Los Nietos\*

\*Unincorporated communities within our District

## Mission Statement

Rio Hondo College 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.

## Save The Date



### 10 a.m. Thursday, Feb. 18:

Watoto Children's Choir performs; Wray Theater

### Noon Tuesday, Feb. 23:

Soroptimist International of Whittier Live Your Dreams Awards Luncheon; Radisson Hotel

### 8:45 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Tuesday,

### Feb. 23 and Wednesday, Feb. 24:

Senior Preview Days

### 7 p.m. Friday, Feb. 26:

Free viewing at the Gordon D. Crowell Astrophysical Observatory

### 8:30 a.m. to noon, Saturday, Feb. 27:

Career & Technical Education Division Open House; Tech Quad

### 7 p.m. Friday, March 4:

Free viewing at the Gordon D. Crowell Astrophysical Observatory

### 6 p.m. Wednesday, March 9:

Board of Trustees meet; Board Room

### Monday, March 28 to Friday, April 1:

Campus closed for Spring Break

## Ugandan Children's Choir to Spotlight Orphan Needs with Rio Hondo Concert

A Ugandan children's choir will perform at 10 a.m. Thursday, Feb. 18 at Rio Hondo College's Wray Theater during the California leg of its 2015-16 world tour to raise awareness of African children orphaned or who face significant health challenges.

The Watoto Children's Choir was founded in 1994 and includes four adults and 18 children – all of whom have lost one or both their parents. The choir is part of the Watoto Church, which creates villages to care for orphaned children, providing them with stable homes and access to education and health care.

The group was invited to perform its "Oh, What Love" tour by Rio Hondo College Choral Director Kellori Dower. The performance is free to the public.

