



PRESS RELEASE

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Three California Community Colleges Programs Honored with Chancellor's Student Success Award

RANCHO MIRAGE, Calif. – In recognition of the “ambitious and unstinting” efforts of three California community college programs toward fostering student success and equity, Chancellor Brice W. Harris presented the Student Success Award at a ceremony today to representatives of American River College's Veterans Resource Center, Merced Community College District's Study Central, and Solano Community College's Umoja Program Scholars.

The Chancellor's Student Success Award, given annually, honors programs that demonstrate a commitment and significant progress toward achieving success and equity goals for students from diverse backgrounds. Winning programs also must exhibit success in the areas of access, retention, course completion, degree and certificate completion, and transfer.

“The ambitious and unstinting efforts of the people honored today have given students who harbored doubts about a college education the resolve and support necessary to finish and excel in their studies,” said California Community Colleges Chancellor Brice W. Harris. “I thank them for exemplifying all that is special and unique about the California Community Colleges and for challenging their fellow educators through their example to see to it that we make a difference in our students' lives each day.”

The Chancellor's Student Success Award was formerly known as the “Chancellor's Award for Best Practices in Student Equity” until 2008 when it received the present name. Its current and full designation is the “Chancellor's Student Success Award for Significant Progress Toward Achieving Student Equity Goals and Success for All Students.”

This year's ceremony was held today during a major statewide meeting of community college representatives sponsored by the Community College League of California at the Westin Mission Hills hotel in Rancho Mirage, Calif. The winners were selected from a highly competitive group of college and district programs.

About the winners:

Veterans Resource Center, American River College in Sacramento, Calif.

The drawdown of U.S. military forces in the Middle East has created a large influx of veterans to community colleges. At American River College, which now hosts the sixth largest veteran population of all community colleges in the state, approximately 1,300 student veterans were enrolled as of spring 2014. Many of these students are low income and face other challenges as they transition back to civilian life. To better serve them, the college relocated and expanded the Veterans Resource Center into a larger office which now serves as a one-stop service center to support student veterans.

The center provides wraparound support services, including assistance with the college application process, counseling, tutoring, career development assistance, a place to study, veteran-specific orientations, peer mentoring, and referrals to social services in the community.

It has been a huge success among student veterans at American River College, with more than 2,000 visits since January 2014.

Study Central, Merced Community College District in Merced, Calif.

Study Central offers a unique, informal environment where academic conversation and inquiry are promoted between students and faculty. This dialogue creates an atmosphere where positive connections outside of the classroom are made that supports student academic success. Study Central offers tutorial assistance from highly trained peer guides and faculty. It is equipped with computers for research and class-related assignments. Each semester, Study Central offers around 40 free, drop-in academic workshops, often facilitated by faculty, that cover a variety of topics related to student success. Study Central serves as an information hub for all student services, with faculty and staff referring students to other academic support programs. Students have access to counselors who assist them with educational planning or registration.

There were approximately 15,130 student visits to Study Central in spring 2014. Many of Study Central's visitors are female, Hispanic, and between 20 to 24 years old, which mirrors the district's overall student population. Statistics indicate that students who utilize Study Central services have higher course completion and success rates compared to the district as a whole, with more than half carrying full-time course loads.

Umoja Program Scholars, Solano Community College in Fairfield, Calif.

Umoja Program Scholars is designed to help students make smooth transitions to college and transfer to a four-year university. It is open to all students, with a particular emphasis on serving African-American students. The program offers academic and career counseling, a summer orientation program, and a curriculum that focuses on improving reading, writing, and critical thinking skills among participants. Umoja courses are transferable and fulfill General Education requirements. The program makes tutors available on a one-on-one basis to students. Those in the program attend workshops that teach life and career skills, have mentors, go on educational field trips, and are assigned readings that focus on cultural studies. Umoja also provides social work interns to help students grapple with personal issues preventing them from achieving their academic goals.

Approximately 250 students are enrolled in the program. Several of the program's courses, in fields like counseling, social science, and English have a passage rate of more than 90 percent. One participant, a veteran who had been incarcerated, credited the program for helping him to earn a 3.2 GPA at Solano and transfer to San Francisco State University.

Nominations for next year's award will be accepted beginning September 2015. For additional information, visit: <http://californiacommunitycolleges.cccco.edu/StudentSuccessAwards.aspx>.

The California Community Colleges is the largest system of higher education in the nation composed of 72 districts and 112 colleges serving 2.1 million students per year. Community colleges supply workforce training, basic skills education and prepare students for transfer to four-year institutions. The Chancellor's Office provides leadership, advocacy and support under the direction of the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges. For more information about the community colleges, please visit <http://californiacommunitycolleges.cccco.edu/>.