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Oregon Community Foundation grant supports RCC leadership program for Hispanic students

The Oregon Community Foundation has presented a $15,000 grant to Rogue Community College to continue developing a leadership and mentoring program designed to encourage Hispanic youth to complete high school and attend college.

The Oregon Leadership Institute, new to RCC this past year, is presented in conjunction with the Oregon Council for Hispanic Leadership. The OLI fosters secondary and postsecondary completion, service learning, and leadership development among Hispanic high school and community college students through mentoring, leadership, career exploration, and team building. The RCC students are mentoring 24 high school-aged students from Phoenix, South Medford and Eagle Point.

OCF Foundation volunteers Jim Dole and Barbara Bean presented the check at the June 21 RCC Board of Education meeting. The Oregon Community Foundation, established in 1973, manages charitable funds donated by individuals, families and businesses to enhance and support quality of life in their communities. The foundation’s endowment consists of over 1,000 funds with combined assets of more than $500 million.

RCC students participating in the Oregon Leadership Institute enroll in a 3-credit transfer course on leadership and mentoring that includes a weekly class and monthly Saturday academies for Hispanic high school students. The yearlong academy focuses on cultural roots and heritage, career and college exploration, taking personal responsibility for attitude and future, and leadership skills. Activities include an outdoor challenge course and graduation celebration.

Victoria Bencomo, one of 11 Rogue Community College students participating this year in the leadership training, mentors three high school students.

“I check in with them to see if they’re doing OK studying, finishing their senior project, and if they are pursuing scholarships. They know they have someone at RCC who cares about helping them,” she said. “We have a good connection.”

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Over the next three years the project will impact 41 college students and 82-95 high school youth. The program is designed to help reduce the higher-than-average dropout rate for Hispanic high schools students. At least 90 percent of OLI high school participants enter post-secondary education.

For Shareen Fiol, the best part of teaching the leadership classes has been seeing what a positive difference building a bond between Latino college students and high school students can make.

“Students who weren’t planning to attend college say now they are going to because of their relationship with mentors,” said Fiol, a transitions specialist at the RCC Riverside Campus. “The potential for Latino students here at Rogue is tremendous, and this is one of those bridges that can make it happen,” she added.

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