



Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Columbia College Honored for Excellence in Incarcerated Students Education

Columbia College and its Rising Scholars program has been recognized as one of a handful of community colleges selected to lead California's efforts to improve education programs for incarcerated students.

Columbia's Rising Scholars program will be one of up to six programs in the state to participate in California's "***Vision 2030 Rising Scholars Demonstration Project***," which will highlight best practices and help dozens of other programs to assist more incarcerated students to complete college certificates and degrees as they prepare to re-enter the community.

Selected colleges were invited "in recognition of your leadership within the Rising Scholars Network and your substantial contributions to facilitating college enrollment for individuals in prison," according to a letter from the California Community College Chancellor's office.

"This is a tremendous honor from the state chancellor's office and recognizes many years of outstanding work by our Rising Scholars team and our partners at Sierra Conservation Center," said Columbia College President Dr. Lena Tran. "Incarcerated students face some of the most difficult barriers and we are dedicated to assisting them in transitioning into productive lives as they are released."

Through its Rising Scholars program, Columbia College, since 2015, has offered a growing variety of face-to-face classes, along with academic advising and other support services to hundreds of incarcerated individuals each year in partnership with Sierra Conservation Center (SCC) and the affiliated fire camps. Columbia is one of 59 community colleges in the state that are part of the Rising Scholars Network. Recognized as a model program, it now serves more than 250 students per semester who typically enroll in multiple classes per term.

Yosemite Community College District Chancellor Dr. Henry Yong said the program is important to the district's educational mission.

"We are committed to supporting education for incarcerated students because it helps to reduce recidivism, by showing them that education can provide an avenue to gainful employment upon their release," he said. "Obtaining higher education can greatly improve their employment prospects, and enable them to successfully re-enter society."

YCCD Board President Dr. Milton Richards commended the Columbia team.

"We congratulate Dr. Tran and her staff on their efforts to help our incarcerated students return to society by providing each student with education and workforce training at Columbia College," he said.

Columbia's Rising Scholars staff looks forward to participating in the demonstration project.

"Our primary goals for the Rising Scholars Program are to provide high quality education that closely mirrors the college experience at Columbia," said Michelle Walker, Columbia College Director of External Initiatives who oversees the program. "We want to create opportunities whereby students can earn a degree and obtain skills that will help them to become employable upon release.

"It is our hope that by using a human-centered approach, continually adapting our program with best practices, and providing a wide variety of courses staffed with faculty who understand the challenges that our students must overcome, we can do our part to help to reduce recidivism and interrupt the prison pipeline," Walker continued. "Our team has worked diligently in partnership with SCC over the years to develop this program and we are honored and humbled to be recognized by the California Chancellor for our efforts."