



Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WHAT: Columbia College Grant Award

Columbia College Awarded \$408,000 State Grant for Incarcerated Students Education Program

Columbia College has been awarded a \$408,000 state grant to expand and strengthen its programs for incarcerated students over the next three years. The grant comes through the Rising Scholars Network, a new program within California Community Colleges funded by California Assembly Bill 417 and designed to support justice-involved students.

The three-year Rising Scholars grant will be issued by the California Community College Chancellor's Office (CCCCO). It will allow Columbia College to offer a wider variety of face-to-face classes and improve advising and other support services to hundreds of incarcerated individuals each year in partnership with the Sierra Conservation Center (SCC) and the affiliated fire camps. Columbia is one of 59 community colleges in the state to be awarded funding through the network.

"Our goal with the Rising Scholars Grant is to help more incarcerated students to complete college certificates and degrees so they can be better prepared to re-enter the community and support themselves and their families once they are released," said Columbia College President Dr. Lena Tran. "This is great news for our partnership with SCC. It's been rewarding to work with them on a program with such an impact on students' lives."

Columbia College has worked closely with SCC and its outlying fire camps since 2015 to provide a growing number of educational opportunities for incarcerated students. What started as a small, innovative pilot of just two general education classes has since grown to a model program that serves more than 250 students per semester who typically enroll in multiple classes per term.

"This grant is coming just as we bring back in-person instruction and advising after being forced to offer correspondence classes during the pandemic," said Michelle Walker, Columbia's Director of External Initiatives. "Our face-to-face classes are the signature piece of our program and what students have been missing the most. We are thrilled to come back on site and reengage students with the personal experience that Columbia College is known for. These additional funds will give us an opportunity to diversify our offerings and provide more meaningful support to both students and instructors, leading to a better overall student experience."

Columbia will use its funding to support currently incarcerated students by hiring additional instructors, expanding instructor training, and providing more direct support services to students.

SCC has been a very collaborative and valuable partner in the program, Walker noted, and the college has worked closely with SCC's educational staff to find solutions within the constraints that are inherent in correctional institutions.

New this fall semester, SCC will be distributing new laptops to students that were purchased and are monitored by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. This will be a significant development for participants, as all student work to this point has been handwritten. The college is now creating trainings for both students and faculty to help them to acclimate to the nuances of the new technology.

"Our hope is to provide these students with skills that will open up real-world opportunities upon release," Walker said.



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