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Cerritos College secures National Association of Higher Education Systems grants, a significant boost to college affordability

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NORWALK, Calif. – August 5, 2024 – Cerritos College has received two National Association of Higher Education Systems (NASH) Catalyst Fund grant awards, making a significant step toward increasing college affordability. The Health Science and Wellness Learning and Career Pathway Success Team has received \$7,500 to cover additional program-specific material costs for participating students in 2025. The Early College Program has been awarded \$5,000 to ease the financial burden for high school seniors applying to universities in 2025.

The NASH Catalyst Fund aims to discover innovative ideas to share with its extensive network of systems nationwide, contributing to equitable student success outcomes. In the latest funding round, NASH focused on initiatives to address cost barriers, enhance affordability, and support equitable access to higher education.

About the Learning Career Pathway Success Team

At Cerritos College, Learning Career Pathways (LCP) are groups of related majors designed to help students choose an area of study and work toward earning an associate degree, developing workforce skills, or transferring to a four-year institution. Each LCP has its own Success Team, a collaborative effort that includes a division dean(s), counselor, instructional faculty, Success Coach, academic support representative, data coach, and social work intern.

LCP Success Teams operate as a cross-functional network, addressing critical needs, experiences, and opportunities students face along their educational journeys. The Success Coaches, who are full-time classified staff, connect students with resources on and off campus, identifying and assisting students at risk of facing academic or financial difficulties. They also provide personalized support and resources to make college more affordable. This interdisciplinary collaboration has improved retention and graduation rates, effectively reducing cost barriers and promoting equitable access to higher education.

"We are excited to receive the NASH grant, which will help us achieve our goal of removing financial obstacles for our health science and wellness students and improving their access to resources that traditional financial aid packages may not cover," said Dr. Elizabeth Riley, dean of health occupations.

About the Early College Program

Established in 2021 in partnership with ABC, Bellflower, and Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School Districts, the Cerritos College Early College Program allows high school students to earn up to 49.5 UC/CSU transferrable units. Students who finish the pathway earn their high school diploma while completing the Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum (IGETC). This series of courses can be used to meet many of the first- and second-year general education requirements at CSU, UC, and independent campuses.

Completing the IGETC curriculum while in high school potentially saves students and parents up to two years of college tuition – which could mean \$29,000 in tuition alone for UCs. Cerritos College waives tuition and fees, while the school district covers all expenses for textbooks and materials, making the program free to high school students. The program has rapidly expanded since 2021 and will serve 950 students from nine high schools during the 2024-25 academic year.

"The grant will assist our first cohort of Early College students with transitioning to the university level," said Colleen McKinley, acting dean of academic affairs. "Early College provides no-cost college credit opportunities for historically underrepresented students and removes cost barriers to higher education. We will enhance program offerings and partnerships to address community interests and student needs."

About Cerritos College: Cerritos College serves as a comprehensive community college for southeastern Los Angeles County. Communities within the college's district include Artesia, Bellflower, Cerritos, Downey, Hawaiian Gardens, La Mirada, Norwalk, and portions of Bell Gardens, Lakewood, Long Beach, Santa Fe Springs, and South Gate. Cerritos College offers nearly 300 degree and certificate programs in nine divisions. Annually, more than 5,000 students successfully complete their course of studies. Enrollment currently averages 21,000 students. Visit Cerritos College online at <http://www.cerritos.edu/>.

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