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Cerritos College employees honored with Excellence Award

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Media Contact: [Aya Aoki](#); Public Affairs

NORWALK, Calif. – February 21, 2024 – Faculty and staff at Cerritos College were selected for the 2024 League for Innovation in Community Colleges Excellence Award. The awardees are:

Dental Hygiene

- Marie Benson, part-time instructor
- Marcey Brabender, part-time instructor
- DiAnn DiPietro-Fife, part-time instructor
- Andrea Grammatica, part-time instructor
- Diane Loera, director/department chair
- Ann Nguyen, part-time instructor
- Kathy Ninomiya, part-time instructor
- Elizabeth Riley, dean of health occupations
- Tennille Rozak, part-time instructor
- Marlena Shore, instructor
- Kristen Stephens, instructor
- Rachel Ward, part-time instructor

Psychology

- Jaclyn Ronquillo-Adachi, professor

The health occupations and dental hygiene honorees were recognized for their collaborative effort in introducing the first-ever bachelor's degree program at Cerritos College in dental hygiene in 2023. Coming in the fall of 2025, the new bachelor's degree program will allow students to earn a four-year degree for less than \$11,000 – a fraction of the tuition at a four-year university, helping students obtain an advanced degree with little to no college debt and increasing the communities' social and upward mobility. The college has offered an Associate of Science degree in Dental Hygiene for 50 years, earning a reputation for excellence and academic rigor as students



Dental Hygiene awardees

boast a 100 percent passage rate on state exams in recent years.

"The dental hygiene team has led the way for innovation in program offerings by bringing the first bachelor's degree to Cerritos College," said Dr. Elizabeth Riley. "For a program whose history spans more than 50 years, this accomplishment and the League Excellence Award from the League for Innovation in the Community Colleges is an honor that will be an enduring part of its legacy. We hope this bachelor's degree is the first of many on our campus as we strive to advance equity, accessibility, and affordability in higher education."



Dr. Jaclyn Ronquillo-Adachi represents the college's renowned mental health worker program. The mental health worker certificate and associate degree programs prepare students to become paraprofessionals in community-based behavioral health programs. Students are trained in psychosocial rehabilitation and recovery paradigms to address the growing demand for well-trained behavioral health professionals. The program boasts a streamlined dual enrollment pipeline for students to jump-start their studies while in high school, work as paraprofessionals upon completion of the certificate program, and advance their careers by continuing their education with transfer to four-year colleges.

Jaclyn Ronquillo-Adachi

"I am honored to receive this award on behalf of our mental health worker program," said Dr. Ronquillo-Adachi. "We aim to train students to become culturally, linguistically, and contextually appropriate workers who can serve underserved populations and contribute to local and global communities."

"We are proud of our faculty and staff and excited for the opportunity to recognize their innovation toward student success. Our dental hygiene and psychology programs are just one of many departments whose dedicated employees continually pave the way to make higher education possible for our community. It is through their hard work and dedication that Cerritos College is making a difference in our students' lives."

The League for Innovation in the Community College is an international nonprofit organization with a mission to cultivate innovation in the community college environment. The League has recognized outstanding faculty, staff, and leaders in the community college field who have made a significant difference in students' lives and in the communities their colleges serve with Excellence Awards since 2012.

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 degrees and certificates in more than 180 areas of study in nine divisions. Annually, more than 1,200 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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