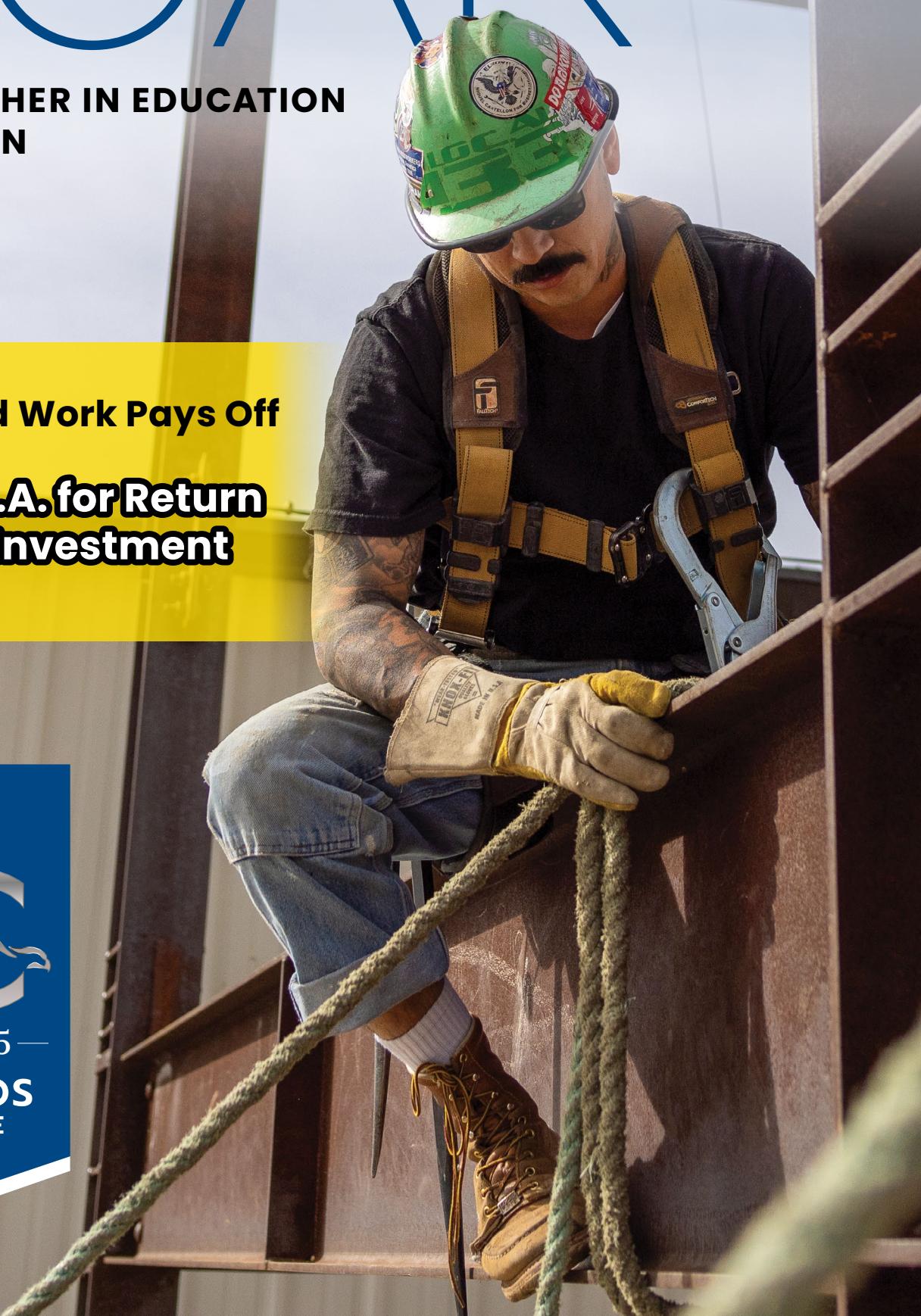


# SOAR

RISING HIGHER IN EDUCATION  
2025 EDITION

Where Hard Work Pays Off

**#1** in L.A. for Return  
on Investment



# SOAR

THE CERRITOS COLLEGE MAGAZINE

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Thank you to all Cerritos College faculty and staff for their contributions to this magazine.



## WHERE EDUCATION PAYS OFF

At Cerritos College, education isn't just a path—it's a payoff. Whether you want a better job, a bigger paycheck, or a university degree, your investment here delivers for life.

The *Golden Returns* report proves it. Cerritos College ranks #1 in Los Angeles County and #10 in California for return on investment. Our students get results fast, recouping their college costs in just two months, while others take years. With an average program cost of \$1,386 and an annual earning boost of \$9,000, that's real value. That's Cerritos College. And for those who transfer and earn a bachelor's degree, the payoff jumps to \$30,000 more each year.

We're not just changing lives. We're changing trajectories. Cerritos College turns potential into prosperity. Our programs in healthcare, technology, business, and manufacturing connect students directly to high-demand careers.

We're also making success visible. New digital tools will show exactly what students can expect—cost, timeline, and earnings—so they can make confident, data-driven choices.

At Cerritos College, you don't just earn a degree. You gain momentum. You build a future. You create opportunities for generations.

That's the Falcon advantage. That's where education pays off.

Enjoy this 2025 edition of *SOAR*, a celebration of the students, faculty, and staff who make our Falcon family climb higher every year.

Jose L. Fierro, D.V.M., Ph.D.  
President/Superintendent

X :@DrJfierro\_      Instagram :@cerritoscollegepres



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Cerritos College stands among the nation's best—one of just 46 colleges to earn the Seal of *Excelencia* for transforming lives.



# WHERE STUDENTS BECOME TEACHERS



## Bryan Valdez Teacher TRAC Class of 2006

When Bryan Valdez walked onto the Cerritos College campus, he didn't know where his path would lead. He only knew he wanted to make a difference.

Bryan found his purpose and his voice through Teacher TRAC. The program didn't just prepare him for a classroom; it showed him what it means to change lives. Encouraged by his advisors, he launched the Association of Future Educators, rallying classmates who shared his passion for teaching.

 *Teacher TRAC helped me find my purpose. Now I get to pass that passion on to my students every day.*

— Bryan Valdez, Kindergarten Teacher and Cerritos College Alumnus 

His first day in a third-grade classroom at Alameda Elementary in Downey sealed the deal. Watching young students light up with curiosity made him realize he was right where he belonged.

When the 2008 recession threatened to derail his transfer plans, Sue Parsons, Teacher TRAC's founding director, refused to let him give up. With her guidance, Bryan pushed forward, transferring to Cal State Long Beach, where he earned his degree and teaching credential.

Today, Bryan teaches kindergarten at Elliott Elementary School in the ABC Unified School District, where his classroom buzzes with energy and possibility. He mentors new teachers, leads the district's induction program, and serves as Vice President of Membership for the teachers' union.



## 25 Years of Teacher TRAC: Powering the Future of Education

For 25 years and counting, Cerritos College fuels the educator pipeline. What started in 1999 as a small idea to solve a local teacher shortage grew into a movement that prepared more than 5,000 future teachers and strengthened classrooms across our region.

### Evolution of Teacher TRAC



**1999**  
Teacher TRAC launches to address California's teacher shortage



**2001**  
First class of 12 students transfer to CSU Long Beach



**2007**  
Wins national Phi Theta Kappa Award; adds Career Technical Education and Special Education pathways



**2011**  
Expands to middle and high school pathways



**2019**  
Introduces Child Development track



**2024**  
Celebrates 25 years of inspiring educators

Teacher TRAC doesn't just prepare students for careers. It launches educators who shape the future. Students gain hands-on classroom experience, transfer seamlessly to CSU campuses, and return to serve the very communities where they grew up.



**SCAN ME**  
to learn how Teacher TRAC keeps our community learning.  
[www.cerritos.edu/teachertrac](http://www.cerritos.edu/teachertrac)

# WHERE SUSTAINABILITY SHAPES OUR FUTURE

## Cerritos Blue is Going Green

Cerritos College is proving that higher education can lead the climate movement. Clean energy. Smart water. Zero waste. Every step moves our campus and community toward a cleaner future.

## Powering Campus with the Sun

A new 6.5-megawatt solar system will soon power 85% of campus electricity and save \$16 million over the next 20 years.

Cerritos College will reach California's renewable energy goal five years early when the system goes live in the new year.

The future isn't waiting. It's already shining here.



## Smarter Water

Ninety-five percent of campus landscaping uses reclaimed water, saving 30 million gallons of drinking water each year.

Every drop conserved reflects our commitment to the community we serve.

## Building for the Future

New facilities, including the Health Science Building (2025) and Student Services and Administration Building (2026), join a growing list of LEED-certified spaces built for innovation and efficiency.

Sustainability isn't an add-on. It's how we build.



## Plastic-Free and Proud

Cerritos College became the first community college in California to adopt a *Break Free from Plastic* policy in 2021.

More than 70 refill stations have already kept 1.3 million bottles out of landfills. Students bring their own bottles, refill, and lead by example.



## Energy Efficiency

Every watt counts. Lighting retrofits and building upgrades save more than 1 million kilowatt-hours each year, cutting emissions and lowering costs.

Those savings, about \$200,000 annually, go right back into classrooms and student success.

## Recycling Every Day

Cardboard, food, and green waste all find new purpose through student-driven programs that reduce waste and strengthen a culture of care.

## Teaching Tomorrow's Leaders

Programs in electric-vehicle technology, green design, and clean energy prepare graduates for high-demand careers that protect our planet.

Students aren't waiting for change. They're creating it.



## SCAN ME

to explore how Cerritos College is leading California's green revolution.  
[www.cerritos.edu/greencerritos](http://www.cerritos.edu/greencerritos)

# WHERE 9,289 DREAMS TURN INTO DEGREES



## Benjamin Lee

**Degree:** Mathematics for Transfer, Physics for Transfer

**Transfer School/Major:** UC Berkeley – Computer Science

**Goal:** Join the Google Brain research team to advance ethical, human-centered AI



## Sharlize Lemus

**Degree:** Engineering

**Transfer School/Major:** Cal Poly San Luis Obispo – Mechanical Engineering

**Goal:** Become a test engineer for an aircraft or electric vehicle manufacturer



## A Record-Breaking Year of Falcon Success

Cerritos College does it again.

The Class of 2025 made history, earning a record 9,289 degrees and certificates—more than ever before. Every number represents a story of persistence, ambition, and transformation.

Falcon graduates don't just cross a stage. They launch into their futures. Ninety-two percent of Cerritos College students who apply to a CSU get accepted, and our transfer students thrive at universities across California and beyond.

The payoff is real. Graduates earn an average of \$9,000 more per year than those with only a high school diploma, and those who transfer and complete a bachelor's degree boost their annual earnings by \$30,000. Education here builds lifetime earning power and economic mobility.

With results like this, we are powering local economic growth. When students have the right support, they soar higher and our communities grow stronger.

This is what progress looks like. This is the Falcon spirit in motion.

## Early College Gives High School Students a Head Start

This year, Cerritos College celebrated its first Early College graduating class. Seventy-two students from Norwalk, Bellflower, and Whitney High Schools completed college coursework while earning their high school diplomas.

Early College gives students a powerful head start with up to 46 transferable units and as much as \$30,000 in tuition savings. These students don't just get ahead. They prove that college dreams can start early and stay local.



## 2024-25 Cerritos College Foundation Scholarships

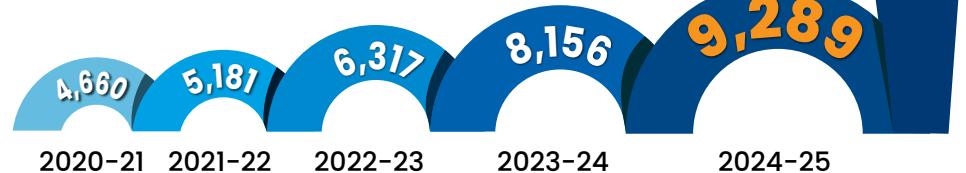


**\$202,537 Awarded**  
(up 50% from 2023-24)



**254 Scholarships Granted**  
to 228 Students

**Degrees and Certificates Awarded**  
*More than double in five years!*



# WHERE EDUCATION REDEFINES BOUNDARIES

## Team Falcons Reach for the Stars

3D models. Late-night labs. Big dreams.

Team Falcons turned an idea into innovation, advancing to Phase II of NASA's 2025 Micro-g NEXt Challenge. They are the only community college team in the nation to reach this stage. Competing alongside top universities, they designed a tool astronauts can use on the surface of the Moon.

After months of design and testing, the team traveled to NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston, where they tested their prototype in the Neutral Buoyancy Lab, the same underwater facility used to train astronauts.

From the classroom to the cosmos, Cerritos College students are proving that innovation knows no limits.

 Not many people get to say they built and tested a device at NASA as a community college student. We collaborated with engineers, shared ideas, and proved what Falcons can do.  
– Danielle Diaz, Team Falcons project manager



## Justice Scholars Open New Pathways

At Los Padrinos, Cerritos College brings something powerful—opportunity through education.

The Justice Scholars Program helps students affected by the criminal justice system rebuild their futures through learning.

Last year, the program brought Cerritos College courses inside Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall, offering both credit and noncredit classes.

Many students in the system are underestimated. Inside Los Padrinos, college shows them they're more than their record. They gain skills, confidence, and a path they carry to Cerritos College and into careers that change their future.

Cerritos College turns potential into purpose, one student at a time.

 The program lifted me from adversity. I'm on track to transfer to a four-year university and become a social worker who helps families in crisis.  
– Jennifer Guillen, Justice Scholar



## Women's Wrestling Three-Peat Championship

The roar inside the gym said it all. Three years. Three championships. One unstoppable team.

The Cerritos College Women's Wrestling Team claimed its third straight 3C2A State Championship, solidifying its place among California's elite. In one of the fastest-growing sports in the nation, the Falcons are setting the standard and making history.

Four champions—Eniekeye Osede, Kinsey Konrad, Vida Beckel, and Raven Ross—brought home individual state titles. Twelve more earned All-American honors.

Head Coach Dustin Kirk secured his third Coach of the Year title, leading with energy, precision, and belief in his athletes.

Cerritos College isn't just competing. We're building champions on the mat and in life.



 Coach Dustin brought energy and structure to our team. He believed in us, and that made all the difference.  
– Vida Beckel, 160-lb state champion



## Native Plant Sanctuary Blooms with Community Care

Buzzing bees. Bright blossoms. Fresh soil under your shoes.

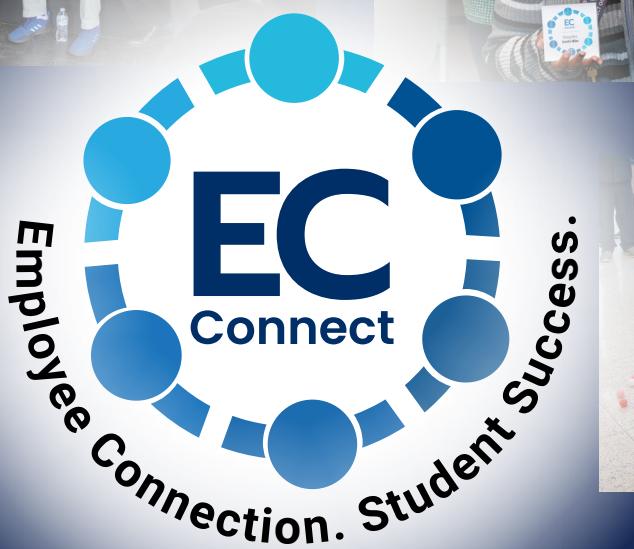
At Cerritos College, sustainability doesn't just grow—it thrives. The Native Plant Sanctuary, established in 2023 by faculty, staff, and students, has become a living classroom east of the Aquatic Center. The space supports local wildlife, restores native ecosystems, and reconnects people with the land.

Monthly volunteer days and hands-on workshops bring students, families, and community members together to learn, plant, and protect California-native species.

This is more than a garden. It's a growing movement rooted in education, community, and care for the environment.

 Volunteering at the sanctuary showed me how small actions create big change.  
– Luisa Oaxaca, Biology student





# WHERE CONNECTION CREATES COMMUNITY

## The Power of the Falcon Family

At Cerritos College, we don't just work together—we lift each other up.

With 1,520 faculty and staff, our campus runs on collaboration, creativity, and care. That commitment starts with real investment. For every \$100 spent, \$91 goes directly to salaries and benefits, supporting the people who teach, mentor, and serve our students every day.

We've built a loyal community. Since 2021, we've retained more than 80% of our Falcon Family.

Connection is at the heart of our culture. People love what they do and who they do it with. Together, we make Cerritos College more than a workplace. We make it a community.

## Join the Best Place to Work



**SCAN ME**  
for current employment  
opportunities.  
[www.cerritos.edu/hr](http://www.cerritos.edu/hr)



## EC Connect in Action

- EC Connect strengthens relationships and builds leaders by bringing employees together to learn, celebrate, and grow.
- EC Games turn friendly competition into genuine connection through events like Falcon Find, 60-Second Showdown, and Can You Relay? Laughter and teamwork build the camaraderie that defines our campus.
- EC Awards celebrate employees who go above and beyond—from protecting our systems, to helping students succeed, to keeping campus welcoming. Every honoree reflects passion, pride, and commitment to students.
- Job Shadow Day gives employees a chance to step into new roles, learn how departments work together, and return with fresh ideas that strengthen our college.
- At Cerritos College, we don't just hire talent. We grow it.

# WHERE CERRITOS LEADS THE CONVERSATION

## Making Headlines That Matter

From national news to local airwaves, Cerritos College is capturing attention and changing the conversation about what community colleges can achieve. Our stories are being told across California and beyond, but the impact starts right here at home.

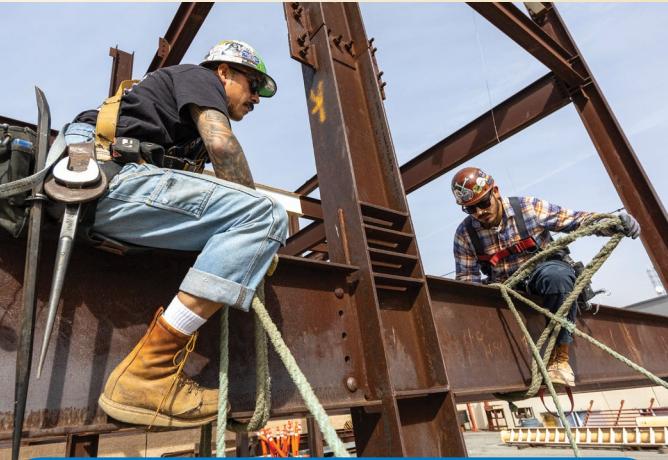
## Championing Bachelor's Degrees for California's Workforce

When President/Superintendent Dr. Jose Fierro spoke out about the future of bachelor's degrees in California, *EdSource* took notice.

In his op-ed "Why California Must Champion Community College Bachelor's Degrees," Dr. Fierro made the case for affordable, workforce-ready bachelor's degree pathways that create opportunity without debt. Cerritos College is leading that mission with its proposed Bachelor of Science in Field Ironworker Supervisor program.

This degree offers what working families need most: low cost, local access, flexibility, and career advancement. The direct path from apprenticeship to high-wage leadership roles fills a statewide workforce gap and allows ironworkers to earn more without pausing their careers.

California doesn't just need more degrees. It needs degrees that work. Degrees that close workforce gaps and lift communities. Cerritos College is leading the way.



 *This is more than a degree. It's a path to economic prosperity and mobility for our local communities.*

— Dr. Jose Fierro,  
President/Superintendent 

## Art That Inspires

The *New York Times* spotlighted the Cerritos College Art Gallery for its exhibition "PETER CARR: Artist for Survival," a powerful retrospective honoring the poet and activist whose work confronted war, politics, and social change.

The exhibition featured large-scale paintings, political posters, and handwritten journals, giving viewers a rare look into Carr's fearless voice and creative resistance. His work challenged institutions, questioned injustice, and sparked conversation, just as it did in the 1970s along the California coast.

At Cerritos College, art isn't silent. Art is a voice for change.

## How to Resurrect a Radical Artist

Forty years after his death, the Californian activist Peter Carr gets a revival of his acerbic paintings and drawings. To make it happen, his protégé spent both labor and love.



## Manufacturing Day on Univision

For many students, Manufacturing Day is more than a campus visit. It's a career awakening, a chance to discover a future built on skills, purpose, and opportunity.

Cerritos College hosted more than 400 high school students for hands-on experiences in automotive, cosmetology, engineering design, welding, and advanced manufacturing. Students explored our labs, met faculty and industry mentors, and saw how training can lead directly to high-paying careers.

*Univision (KMEV)* featured the event on "Noticias," highlighting how Cerritos College is building Southern California's skilled workforce and expanding access to technical careers.

Students left inspired and informed, with a clear path forward and the confidence to pursue it.



**SCAN ME**

for hands-on career training.  
[www.cerritos.edu/cte/trade-programs.htm](http://www.cerritos.edu/cte/trade-programs.htm)



Whether it's policy, art, or workforce innovation, Cerritos College keeps raising the bar for what a community college can be.

We don't just join the conversation. We lead it.



**Cerritos Community College District**  
11110 Alondra Blvd., Norwalk, CA 90650  
(562) 860-2451 | [www.cerritos.edu](http://www.cerritos.edu)



Connect with us [@cerritoscollege](https://www.instagram.com/cerritoscollege)

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## Join Us at the Performing Arts Center

The lights are on. The music's ready. The stage is calling.

Celebrate the arts at Cerritos College—where creativity takes center stage.



**Uncle Vanya**  
February 27–March 8

**Jazz, Dance & Choral Performances**  
March through May

**Zombie Prom**  
May 1–10

**Spring Festivals & Student Showcases**  
All season long

## Cerritos College Delivers Results

**#1 in Los Angeles County,  
#10 in California for  
Return on Investment**

**COLLEGE  
FUTURES**

**THE  
HEA  
GROUP**

**#1 Hispanic-Serving  
Institution in California,  
#6 in the U.S.**

**Washington  
MONTHLY**

**2025 Examples of *Excelencia* Winner  
General Motors Automotive  
Service Education Program**

**iExcelencia IN EDUCATION!<sup>TM</sup>**  
EXAMPLES **EXCELENCIA**

## Spring semester begins January 12!

Cerritos College is committed to providing an educational environment that is free from discrimination and harassment. We do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, or any other characteristic protected by law in any of our programs or activities. For more information regarding our policies, please contact our Director, Compliance, Diversity, & Title IX Coordinator/Section 504 & Title II Coordinator at [www.cerritos.edu/hr](http://www.cerritos.edu/hr).

**SCAN ME**  
to apply and join  
the Falcon family.



Cerritos College is fully accredited by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges.