



CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES

CHANCELLOR'S OFFICE

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11th Annual Dr. John W. Rice Award Honors Those who Exemplify Diversity and Equity within the California Community Colleges

Santa Barbara City College American Sign Language professor and Santa Barbara City College Veterans Support Program join American River College associate vice president as 2011 award winners

SACRAMENTO, Calif. – The 11th annual Dr. John W. Rice Diversity and Equity Award ceremony was held today at The Sterling Hotel and celebrated the accomplishments of two individuals and one program within the California Community Colleges.

Named after the former member of the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges, the Rice Award was given to Santa Barbara City College professor Ignacio Ponce, the Santa Barbara City College Veterans Support Program and to Dr. Lisa Aguilera Lawrenson, the associate vice president of instruction at American River College in Sacramento.

“Dr. Rice knew that an education was the great equalizer, something that could never be taken away from an individual who earned it,” said California Community Colleges Chancellor Jack Scott. “He was a tireless fighter for diversity and equity across the system and this year’s winners exemplify his passion and a sampling of the many ways the community colleges serve people from all walks of life. I am proud of these individuals and the veterans support program which has been recognized nationally for the excellent job it does serving our returning soldiers.”

This award is named in honor of former Board of Governors’ member Dr. John W. Rice. He served on the Board from 1992 until his death in 2000 and was a leader, innovator, and spokesperson for equal employment opportunity and nondiscrimination in the California Community Colleges. While on the board, Dr. Rice also displayed a strong commitment to multicultural learning experiences for all students. The Dr. John W. Rice Diversity and Equity Award was established in 2001 to honor community college staff members, districts, colleges, or programs that have made the greatest contribution towards faculty and staff diversity or student equity.

Born to a Presbyterian pastor in Baton Rouge, La. and living through years of segregation and the civil rights

era, Dr. Rice was passionate about ensuring the California Community Colleges staff, faculty and student body reflected the diversity of California. He is the father of former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

“I called John ‘my gentle giant’ for he was indeed that – in mind, body and soul,” said Dr. Rice’s widow, Clara Rice, who attended the ceremony. “John was strong in his opinions, yet wise enough to relent when necessary. He knew that a good education was the key to a better life and made it his mission to improve the minds of young people. John had a passion for making that which was wrong, right. He fought for equality most of his life.”

Ignacio Ponce is the first tenure-track American Sign Language (ASL) instructor at Santa Barbara City College’s School of Modern Languages. Since his arrival in fall 2008, he has been responsible for the expansion of the ASL program. Prior to Mr. Ponce becoming a faculty member at Santa Barbara, the college offered only beginning ASL classes and enrolled approximately 100 students. Today, Santa Barbara offers beginning to advanced ASL courses and has doubled the program’s average enrollment.

The Santa Barbara City College Veterans Support Program, led by Magdalena Torres since 1974, is dedicated to assisting former military members in making a successful transition to college life. During the 2010-11 academic year, Ms. Torres and her staff of four part-time students helped 195 veterans create individual educational plans. They then monitored and evaluated each student’s progress in accomplishing his or her goals. This one-on-one assistance and the excellent financial aid, academic policies and supportive campus culture were cited as the reasons Military Times EDGE magazine recognized Santa Barbara City College as one of the top 101 “Best for Vets” colleges in the United States.

Dr. Lawrenson is credited for developing American River College’s Multicultural Week; a popular campus-wide event that brings students, faculty, and staff together to celebrate diversity and inclusion. And, for the Spring 2008 Convocation, Dr. Lawrenson organized a diversity panel that featured faculty and staff who spoke candidly about their personal experiences as members of various underrepresented groups both on campus and in the United States. She has been chair of the American River College Equity Committee since 2005.

Santa Barbara City College is the first campus to win two Dr. John W. Rice awards in the same year. Since the award was established in 2001, the Los Rios Community College District has received the honor the most times.

The [California Community Colleges](#) is the largest system of higher education in the nation. It is composed of 72 districts and 112 colleges serving 2.76 million students per year. Community colleges supply workforce training, basic skills courses in English and math, and prepare students for transfer to four-year colleges and universities. The Chancellor’s Office provides leadership, advocacy and support under the direction of the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges.

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