



Working Together



Los Rios Community College District and the Los Rios College Federation of Teachers are partners that put their students and faculty first.



PHOTOS BY JOAN KUDIN

"Why do you teach?"



"Teaching is like entering a forward-facing time machine. Every day I resource students with tools to create a better tomorrow. Education is hope in action."

Angelo A. Williams
Sacramento City College



"Our students are rarely privileged and have survived setbacks. These are my people, and I live to see them succeed."

Paula Haug
Folsom Lake College



"The people are real and so are their struggles and triumphs, and when combined with

the diversity in age, background and experiences, this makes the job real, alive and rewarding."

Sarah Hancock
Cosumnes River College



"Community colleges are alive with energy and excitement. Students are going places and

dreaming dreams that they can actually make come true. Their lives are filled with possibility.

Denise Engler
American River College

Faculty and Students Are This Union's Priority

The Los Rios College Federation of Teachers helps create a safe and welcoming environment so everyone can succeed

BY THEA MARIE ROOD

The Los Rios College Federation of Teachers cares deeply about faculty, but it is equally committed to ensuring students have everything they need — both inside and outside of the classroom.

"The faculty provides education to students, but it also provides safe spaces to students who may feel unsafe for one reason or another," said Robert Perrone, executive director of LRCFT. "For example, the union has developed programs around the issues ... of food and housing insecurity and undocumented communities."

The four Los Rio Community College District campuses include American River College, Cosumnes River College, Folsom Lake College and Sacramento City College, which together serve 75,000 students in the Sacramento region.

Both district and union leaders understand the important role and rich history these campuses play in their community, offering generations of young people a chance to achieve their dreams — no matter what their background is or what challenges they face.

According to Hunger on Campus, a 2016 landmark study, 50 percent of community college students reported food insecurity, which is defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as limited or uncertain access to

nutritious food. And 25 percent of community college students had very low food security, which means they are not eating regular meals and have a reduced food intake.

The same report found 53 percent of community college students faced housing insecurity and 13 percent experienced some level of homelessness.

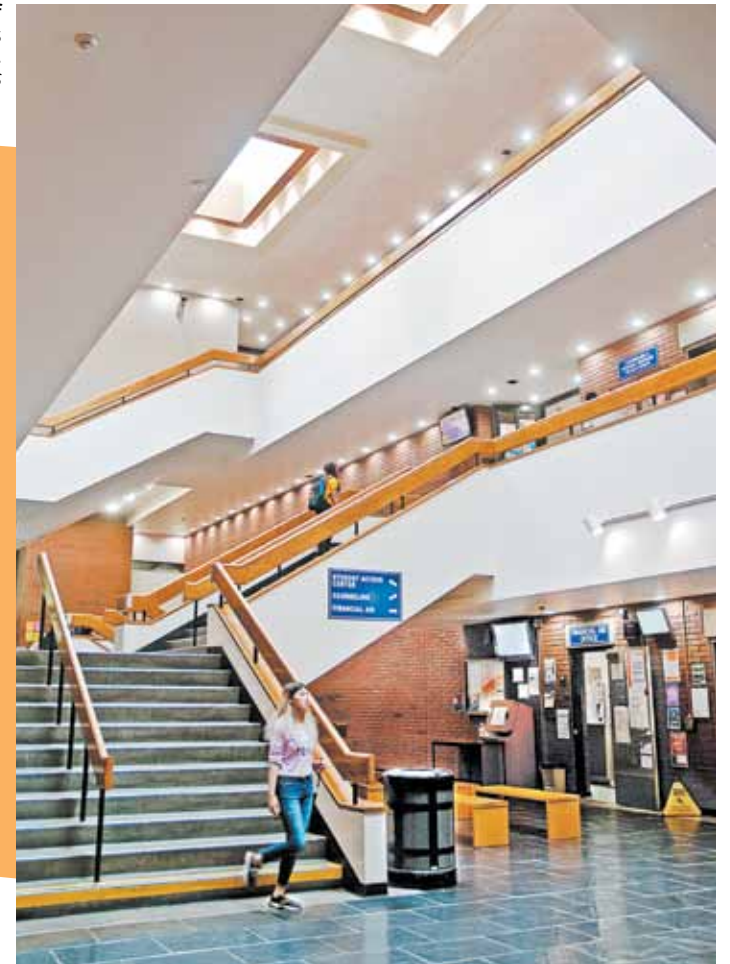
The union also is focused on protecting undocumented students, faculty and staff through a program known as UndocuAlly Training. It provides information on federal and state policies, the latest legal updates, and even what to do if students, college staff, faculty or administrators are confronted by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

"We have a responsibility to our students and the surrounding community."

Dean Murakami
President, Los Rios College Federation of Teachers

"LRCFT is currently [sponsoring] legislation that will provide community college funding for student emergency aid, housing insecurity and food insecurity," said Dean Murakami, President of LRCFT. "In addition, we have our food banks at our colleges that provide food to our students every two weeks. This is to help students with their critical needs so that they can stay in college and be successful."

"We want to let people know that unions such as LRCFT have an interest beyond just the classroom or our contract," Murakami said. "We have a responsibility to our students and the surrounding community."



From Prison to College

Inmates discover the transformative power of education

BY HOWARD HARDEE

Charles, 31, spent his entire adult life bouncing among various state prisons in California before finally making parole in December 2018.

Long before his release, he decided he didn't want a criminal history to define the rest of his life. He knew "from day one," he said, that he could avoid that fate only through education.

But he didn't have the opportunity to take face-to-face college classes until he was transferred to Mule Creek State Prison, a facility in Amador County.

"I waited for years for education to be available to me," he said. "It was a real-deal college experience. We were treated like real people, which is so different from how you're treated by staff when you're in prison."

After parole, Charles, a pseudonym, subsequently became the first student to transition from classes at Mule Creek to on-campus classes at Folsom Lake College's Prison and Reentry Education Program.

The program is spearheaded by Dr. Kalinda Jones, a professor of social work and human services, and the lead faculty member on a \$100,000 grant. It is intended to help people re-enter society by taking college classes before and after their sentences are complete.

Many of Dr. Jones' students in prison were subjected to sexual and physical abuse and extreme neglect during childhood. Then

as incarcerated adults, they are deprived of physical contact, social interaction and basic human respect.

"The program has demonstrated that when these students are given the educational opportunity, they are capable of overcoming their extremely difficult past and present challenges," Dr. Jones said. "This provides the means for these students to grow, mature and successfully assimilate back into society."

"My philosophy is to find the resources, work hard and do the best I can to be successful."

Charles

Former prison inmate

In addition to academics, participants are taught community organizing, team-building and active listening.

"Education is a transformative experience," she said. "You learn collaborative skills and emotional regulation. You learn to deal with people who are

different from you. I hear from a lot of my students, 'This gives me another option than doing drugs, getting involved in gangs in the yard or isolating myself in my cell.'"

Prior to taking classes with Dr. Jones and other faculty members, Charles said, he lacked the "soft social skills" employers are looking for. That's why he believes his own re-entry process really began years before he was released from prison.

"If we're talking about really helping people get their lives going, helping them be successful in the real world, they need to start preparing while they're incarcerated," he said. "It doesn't matter what the hurdles are — my philosophy is to find the resources, work hard and do the best I can to be successful."



Dr. Kalinda Jones

PHOTO COURTESY OF LRCFT



Educational resources

The Prison and Reentry Education Program means people can learn while they are incarcerated and continue their education once they are paroled. This increases job opportunities for former prison inmates and can lead to college degrees or certificates. Credits from coursework can also be applied to transfer to four-year universities.

Courses Offered at Mule Creek State Prison in Ione:

- Social Work Human Services
- Small Business Management: Entrepreneurship
- Communications Studies

Courses Offered at Folsom Women's Facility:

- Small Business Management: Entrepreneurship Culinary Arts

Courses Offered at Folsom Lake College:

- Social Work Human Services
- Small Business Management: Entrepreneurship
- Communication Studies

Food for Thought

With steady access to food, college students can focus better on their studies

BY ZOE MANZANETTI



College is meant to be challenging. However, it's nearly impossible for students who are always battling hunger. Unfortunately, that situation is a reality for thousands of college students across the nation.

In an effort to reduce the number of hungry students on its own campuses, Los Rios Community College District is actively breaking down barriers to food access in order to mitigate these issues and help students achieve greater success.

Dr. Veronica Lopez is both a professor at American River College and the chair of the Los Rios College Federation of Teachers' Social Justice Caucus. Since December 2016, she has been helping the district fight food insecurity, which is defined as a consistent challenge in obtaining food.

After hearing that some of her students were fighting hunger in class, Dr. Lopez immediately became concerned.

"[I thought,] 'It's going to make them lethargic, tired and with the challenge of learning something new, the wall [to success] is even bigger,'" she said.

Dr. Lopez and her colleagues across the district are asking themselves questions like: "How are we going to elicit change and have a positive impact on our students?"

One solution was to organize bi-weekly food distributions for ARC students, with support from the Sacramento Food Bank and the campus' Associated Student Body, a group dedicated to giving students a voice in decision-making. These distributions are a positive place, music is played there and students can talk with organizers about recipes.

However, Dr. Lopez noted the stigma around food insecurity is still inhibitory for many students.

"If I'm hungry during a class, I can't focus."

Sanaz Jafartayari
Student, American River College

For instance, Sanaz Jafartayari, a student at ARC with aspirations to enter into the health field, said she felt embarrassed the first time she received food from a campus event.

"But it feels normal now — this food is provided because [the college] found it to be helpful," Jafartayari said. "Feeling hungry decreases performance significantly. If I'm hungry during a class, I can't focus on what the professor is talking about."

Jafartayari is excited by ARC's proposal to find a permanent location for its pantry but doesn't want the district's work to stop there — she knows expanded resources means more students will have food access.

Dr. Lopez agreed. That's why she hopes that raising awareness will mean more food pantries across the district.

"Hunger doesn't go away — you always have someone who could use a little extra," Dr. Lopez said. "It's a reality and we have to do something."

How to get food on campus

Students and professors both agree that students cannot achieve academic greatness if their stomachs are grumbling, but the reality is that 50 percent of students at Los Rios Community College District are facing challenges like food insecurity. Here's how the district is combating hunger, so food is never an obstacle on the pathway to success:

- The district partners with the Los Rios College Federation of Teachers and the Sacramento Food Bank to offer free food resources for students.
- Sacramento City College distributes food weekly through its RISE events. (www.scc.losrios.edu/rise/food-distribution)
- Folsom Lake College gives students food or food vouchers through its confidential #FoodForFalcons program. (www.flc.losrios.edu/campus-life/health-and-safety/student-food-cabinets)
- Staffed and operated by its student ambassadors, Cosumnes River College has food available at its Hawk Spot Food Pantry. (www.crc.losrios.edu/services/studentlife/hawkspot)
- American River College operates a pop-up Beaver Food Pantry to hand out bread and fresh produce. (www.arc.losrios.edu/foodpantry)

For more information on pantry locations, policies and hours, contact your campus' Los Rios College Federation of Teachers representative at lrcft.org/who-we-are/executive-board/executive-board-members.

Making DREAMs come true

Los Rios Community College District provides undocumented students and staff opportunities to build their futures

BY ANNE STOKES

Undocumented assistance

It's hard to focus on getting an education or teaching students when you're worried about being undocumented. In the Los Rios Community College District, there are resources available for undocumented students and faculty who may need help.

The Dream Center provides pro bono legal resources for students and faculty.



The Puente Project is a cohort-style learning community for educationally underserved students who intend to transfer to a four-year college to earn a degree and give back to their communities.



UndocuAlly Training helps faculty, administrators and classified employees provide a sanctuary environment for undocumented staff and students. The training helps participants understand current legislation and pertinent updates, as well as how to handle ICE confronting students or staff on campus.



Jesus Limon Guzman was 8 when his family came to California. En route from Guadalajara, he remembers his sister praying for a safe border crossing.

"I was thinking, 'Why would we not make it across the border?' he said. "'We don't have permission,' is how she framed it."

Growing up, being undocumented overshadowed every aspect of their lives. They even avoided interacting with law enforcement

"I feel safe coming here to school and not having to worry about any legal [issues]."

Jose Gonzalez

Sacramento City College student, DREAMer and DACA recipient

as victims of a crime for fear of being asked for documentation. Many undocumented students don't pursue college for that same reason.

Guzman credits a network of people — faculty, administrators, staff and peers — with helping him attend Sacramento City College (SCC) and Sacramento State University, where he earned his master's degree in English literature. But he was unsure about his future career prospects as an undocumented immigrant. That changed in 2013 when he was granted limited immigration through the federal Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. Today, he's an assistant professor of English at SCC.

With the passing of DACA and Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) acts, California's educational landscape has changed. The Los

Rios Community College District is now able to provide official avenues of support. Those resources are something SCC student Jose Gonzalez, DREAMer and DACA recipient, says he's grateful for.

"I feel safe coming here to school and not having to worry about any legal [issues]," he said.

Born in Mexico City, Gonzalez came to the U.S. with his family at the age of 7. After initially receiving DACA status at the age of 15, he recently renewed his application, now more aware of what was at stake: avoiding deportation and being able to continue his education.

"Once I receive my bachelor's degree or a master's, it can't be taken away, it's mine forever," he said. "In case I get deported

after DACA expires ... at least I'll go back to Mexico with my degree."

This year, Gonzalez started an internship at the State Capitol and is considering a career in public service.

"There is a lot of inequality and I want to do government work because I know that policy is one way of helping my community," he said.

That's something Guzman wishes more people knew.

"DREAMers want to help in the collective pursuit of happiness," Guzman said. "They aspire for that same American dream, not just for their own selves ... but to help ensure that more people can have that dream."



Sacramento City College student Jose Gonzalez, left, and assistant professor of English Jesus Limon Guzman — both DREAMers and DACA recipients — were able to achieve their higher education goals due to legislative acts and Los Rios Community College District's inclusive policies toward undocumented students.

PHOTO BY ANNE STOKES

The Los Rios Community College District employs more than 2,500 staff members.
PHOTO BY ANNE STOKES

Partners in Success

How the faculty union and college district work together for a better environment

BY ZOE MANZANETTI



Students get the best education when their teachers feel supported and content with their jobs, but how does that happen? With a mutually beneficial partnership between the school district and union.

For instance, the Los Rios College Federation of Teachers works hard to ensure that the needs of their members are addressed by maintaining a positive relationship with the Los Rios Community College District. Both parties agree this relationship is based on transparency and trust.

They've been very upfront and very transparent, which makes managing budgets easy."

But successfully managing a budget, which includes faculty resources and salaries, is only one small part of keeping the district's teaching community happy. The union and the district also work together to offer programs that extend beyond the classroom. These programs, created by the union's Social Justice Caucus

In fact, LRCFT and the district also work together to spread awareness of social justice issues on campus, so that community members can create change and take responsibility in the region surrounding the college.

"Things like donations that can go to the nonprofit part of the system or more people knocking on the legislature's door all help," Murakami said. "The union knows that there are certain priorities that all of us have, no matter whether you're a student or faculty member."

"That's our function, to give everybody a chance to move from where they are to something better."

Dean Murakami

Professor of Psychology, American River College, and President, Los Rios College Federation of Teachers

More than 2,500 faculty and staff members are employed throughout the district.

"They've come to trust how well the union has worked with the district to manage the budget and keep it financially stable," said Dean Murakami, Professor of Psychology at American River College and President of the union. "Over the past 12 years, we've built a great relationship with the budget people in the district.

and the district, focus on issues that may be confronting both faculty and students — such as homelessness, food insecurity, mental health issues, addiction, abuse or other challenges.

"Our part-time faculty face the same issues students do, so we try and fight for them just as much," Murakami said. "That's our function, to give everybody a chance to move from where they are to something better."

How the union helps students

The Los Rios College Federation of Teachers knows that happy faculty are only part of a successful school environment. Students are just as important.

"The union's been instrumental in spreading the word among faculty about the plight of students, but our efforts don't stop there," said Robert Perrone, executive director of LRCFT.

Both LRCFT and the Los Rios Community College District have worked to **establish food pantries** on all campuses and pass bills that allow **students who are experiencing homelessness** to sleep in their

cars in the campus parking lots. They have also pursued partnerships with legislators that resulted in **\$10 million in mental health funding** and a program for immigration students called **UndocuAlly**.

"I hope the district will become a place where students can get an education, but they can also get help in these other important areas as well," said Dean Murakami, psychology professor at American River College and LRCFT president.



For more information on programs LRCCD and LCRFT have created together, visit lrcft.org.

Creating Change

Dean Murakami is committed to bringing social justice to Los Rios

BY HOWARD HARDEE

As President of the Los Rios College Federation of Teachers, Dean Murakami is focused on the changes he wants to see in the world.

Much of his job involves negotiating contracts, salaries and benefits based on budgets set by state lawmakers. But an equally important role is facilitating cooperation between the union and the Los Rios Community College District to help disadvantaged student populations.

In fact, the LRCFT is committed to social justice by working to garner resources that address students' most pressing needs, which include poverty, food and housing insecurity, mental health, discrimination and any form of abuse. Its work reaches well beyond the classroom, and extends into the community.

"Teaching classes isn't enough," he said. "We need to be a full-service institution."

How would you describe the relationship between the union and the LRCCD, and how does it promote student success?

We try to coordinate with the district as much as we can to support the needs of our students. We have what we call an UndocuAlly program, which helps inform faculty and students of their rights in terms of immigration if ICE comes into any of our colleges. The training helps participants understand mental health concerns, develop pedagogical tools for working with undocumented students, and provides an introduction to on-campus

resources. We do training on this about three times a year, at each of the colleges, and the program we started in Los Rios has become recognized nationally. That's an example of an effort the district is supporting as well.

We also helped sponsor the food banks — every two weeks, we have a food bank distributing low-cost food to students — and we're trying to enhance the program with the district. At the same time, I'm pitching the legislature to get more funding for food banks and addressing issues around homelessness.

As a union, we feel a responsibility to help our students be successful in ways that aren't recognized by the legislature.

Do you consider mental health a critical area of need among your students?

That's an important part of helping our students. We see mental health as another barrier to student success. If they get treated for their anxiety, stress or depression, they can continue being successful in their classes and progressing toward their degree.

But if students are struggling with mental health, or they don't have enough food to eat, or they can't find a job, or they're living in a car — all of these things are barriers to the success of our students. If they're in poverty and can't afford housing, they can't afford to come to college.

Unfortunately, we see this too often in our classrooms. We have very good students, but life circumstances get in the way and they drop out. We want to prevent that from happening.



"We're trying to help students move out of poverty, get their degree, get a better job or go to a four-year college, and to be successful in their lives."

Dean Murakami

Los Rios College Federation of Teachers President

Do you think your efforts are making a real difference in the big picture?

I've been arguing for student support for more than 10 years. Believe me, nobody listened to me in those early years. But today, our administration at Los Rios and the state legislature are getting it, though lawmakers aren't putting in enough money to address the seriousness of the problem.

In our community colleges, over half of our students are facing either food insecurity or housing insecurity. That means 40,000 students

in Los Rios aren't meeting these basic needs, and many of them are dropping out because of these barriers. The issues we're facing are gigantic. This shouldn't be happening in a state that's supposed to be this wealthy.

So we're trying to help students move out of poverty, get their degree, get a better job or go to a four-year college, and to be successful in their lives. That's what is really important to us.

In Her Own Words

Earlyn Robinson spent 14 years at American River College, taking her time and learning the best way for her

"My experience at Los Rios was a journey — it was good, it was challenging, it pushed me to expand my intellect and my world."

The time that I spent there gave me a solid foundation on how to perceive life. My professors taught me various styles to articulate what I'd like to express. And that opened the door — wide open. I felt free, free to think and say what I think. It really illuminated my mind."

Earlyn Robinson

Former student who spent 14 years at American River College before attending Sacramento State University for her bachelor's and master's degrees.

"I think that the Los Rios system is one of the most challenging experiences students will ever have. And I would suggest that they take their time and absorb it, not just try to rush through and get to the next step, but literally embrace the learning experience. That is the foundation and you just build on it. I've gone on to get my master's degree at Sacramento State, and had it not been for my education at Los Rios, I don't think I would have gotten anywhere near that. It gave me that confidence."



PHOTO COURTESY OF EARLYN ROBINSON

Find Out MORE

The Los Rios Community College District and the Los Rios College Federation of Teachers ensure students achieve success by their own terms. Attention to students' diverse passions and backgrounds is of the utmost focus and serves as the primary method to guarantee students are happy and successful.

There is a supportive team waiting to contribute to your educational pursuits. Don't hesitate to reach out!



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