

PRESS RELEASE

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OCC CLEEO Project Partners with First Choice Bank for Student Scholarships



Orange Coast College's Counseling Latinos for Equity and Engagement (CLEEO) Project has formed a partnership with First Choice Bank to provide 10 scholarships annually to students at the College. The scholarships are available in \$1000 and \$500 increments, and the first distribution took place in December 2020.

First Choice also has provided OCC's CLEEO Project with a grant through the Orange Coast

College Foundation that will go toward additional scholarships awarded at the College's annual scholarship event, Honors Night, in May. Additional planning is under way to establish a workshop series at Coast that will help students and employees learn about financial literacy and cultural competency.

"Like all financial institutions in United States, First Choice Bank takes steps to remain compliant with the Community Re-Investment Act, which asks banks to address financial literacy, especially in low to moderate income populations within the communities in which they serve," says OCC Associate Professor and CLEEO Project Coordinator Eric Cuellar. "I am pleased to see First Choice Bank being proactive in reaching out to diverse communities in Orange County, including at Orange Coast College."

Cuellar shares that an OCC alumni and First Choice Bank employee named Jarold Ramirez, along with his colleague Nora Perez, helped to facilitate the partnership upon realizing that the two organizations share many of the same goals that the CLEEO Project is working toward. "Jarold graduated from OCC and eventually transferred to Cal State Fullerton and plans to attend law

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school. He has kept in touch over the years, and has continued to attend events organized by CLEEO,” Cuellar explains.

The CLEEO Project was founded in 2016 by Cuellar, and in 2018 he teamed up with OCC professors Jordan Stanton and Rendell Drew to create a CLEEO Learning Cohort with a theme of "Race, Ethnicity, and Equity in America." The learning cohort focuses on developing an educational pathway for college students with an emphasis on the successful development of life skills.

The CLEEO Project also hosts several events throughout the year, including guest lectures, workshops or “Summits,” and art exhibits. In 2019, the CLEEO Project was successful in bringing Civil Rights activist and Presidential Medal of Freedom Recipient Dolores Huerta to campus as a guest speaker.

“Research has shown that only 2–4 percent of Latinos in the U.S. hold doctorate degrees. So one of the main tenets of OCC’s CLEEO Project is to establish an education pipeline from community college to post-graduate education,” says Cuellar. “Students can participate as much as they want. But already we have seen many of our CLEEO students successfully transfer and obtain their bachelor’s degree, and even continue on to law school, MBA programs, etc.”

The CLEEO 10.0 Virtual Summit, “Covid 19 & Latinos: Opportunities to Strengthen Student Leadership for Community Engagement,” is scheduled for Feb. 18–May 13. The 8-session seminar will be presented by Dr. David E. Hayes Bautista, Professor at UCLA School of Medicine. To learn more visit OCC’s CLEEO Project website

[Orange Coast College](http://orangecoastcollege.edu), founded in 1947, is one of the nation's top transfer schools. With a student population of 25,000, OCC provides exemplary programs leading to Associate degrees and 130 career programs. The college's 164-acre campus is located in the heart of Costa Mesa.