



## OCC Awarded More Than 5,000 Degrees, Certificates at 76th Commencement Ceremony

Orange Coast College conferred 5,505 associate degrees and certificates of achievement to some 2,666 graduates at the 76th commencement ceremony on May 24.

Several thousand attended the program at the Pacific Amphitheatre in the OC Fair and Event Center.

Graduating with an associate degree in liberal arts, student speaker Haley Mauser shared her inspiring journey with the graduating class. As a single mom with two children, she managed a full-time job and numerous volunteer commitments while pursuing her education at OCC, primarily online. In August, Haley will be transferring to Cal Poly Humboldt to complete her bachelor's degree in leadership studies, which she will also complete online.

This year, OCC inducted civil rights activist Sylvia Mendez into the College's esteemed Alumni Hall of Fame. Sylvia Mendez's pivotal role in the groundbreaking Mendez v. Westminster case, a triumph against racial segregation in California schools, is a testament to her unwavering commitment to civil rights. Mendez received a standing ovation during the ceremony.

Faculty of the Year Laurie Barton also addressed the graduating class. Barton, an English as a Second Language instructor, is committed to her students and has created and implemented a culturally responsive curriculum that meets her ESL students where they are.

OCC's Class of 2024 is diverse, spanning a wide age range, from our youngest graduate, 18, to our oldest, 72. Additionally, OCC has 191 international student graduates from 29 countries.

## Orange Coast College Inducted Civil Rights Activist Sylvia Mendez into Alumni Hall of Fame

Orange Coast College has named civil rights activist Sylvia Mendez as the College's 2024 inductee into the Alumni Hall of Fame.

Sylvia Mendez played an instrumental role in the groundbreaking Mendez v. Westminster case. This case, which was a triumph against racial segregation in California schools, was a pivotal moment in the fight for civil rights.

"We are honored to bestow this recognition to OCC alumna Sylvia Mendez," says OCC President Angelica Suarez. "Her lifelong dedication to civil rights and ongoing commitment to social justice



align directly with the values of our College.”

Mendez v. Westminster successfully ended de jure segregation in California, setting a precedent for the nation. The case was named after Gonzalo and Felicitas Mendez, Sylvia Mendez’s parents, who were at the forefront of the battle for equal education.

“I learned very good lessons in life and it was all due to the court case that went on,” says Sylvia Mendez. “I have been so blessed by those students who accepted me when I started speaking.”

The success of the Mendez v. Westminster case made California the first state in the nation to end segregation in schools, setting the stage for the historic Brown v. Board of Education ruling, which found that racial segregation in schools is unconstitutional.

Today, Mendez still travels to discuss her story and civil rights, including a notable return to OCC. She continues the legacy left by her parents by fighting for quality education and encouraging students to stay in school. She retired as a nurse after working more than thirty years in the field.

Mendez earned an associate degree in nursing from Orange Coast College in 1964 and a bachelor of science degree in nursing from California State University, Los Angeles.

“It’s so beautiful and it makes me feel so good to know I graduated from (OCC),” says Mendez. “It’s wonderful and then I think of all my teachers at that time and how sweet they were to me. I never had any prejudice or any horrible bullies. Here it was in the 1960s, horrible things going on in the south at the time, (and) I never had any of that (at OCC). Never.”

In recognition of her extraordinary contributions, Mendez was bestowed with the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2011, the highest civilian honor in the United States, by President Barack Obama.

Mendez was formally inducted into the Alumni Hall of Fame during the College’s Commencement ceremony on May 24.

Before OCC’s Commencement ceremony, Mendez had a plaque bearing her resemblance added to the OCC Alumni Hall of Fame wall on the second floor of the College Center.

## OCC’s First Graduating Cohort of Community Health Workers Equipped for Equitable Care

Orange Coast College conferred certificates to the inaugural cohort of 18 students who completed the Community Health Worker program on May 17.

Generously funded by the Samueli Foundation, Orange Coast College has developed a program that addresses the urgent need for certificated community health workers in the health and nonprofit sectors. These workers are crucial in filling service gaps for at-risk individuals and connecting those underserved by the traditional healthcare system with culturally competent health and social services. They are the vital link that overcomes cultural and linguistic barriers, ensuring equal access to healthcare for all communities.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the demand for community health workers is set to surge by 14 percent from 2022 to 2032, a growth rate significantly higher than the average for all occupations.

“Inside of the classroom and with the right direction, we were able to bring and reflect on our personal qualities and attributes,” says OCC graduate Ronnie Perez. “As a result, after being introduced to the roles and competencies of the CHW, we were allowed to collectively define empathy and formulate how to function as a “frontline public health worker.”



The first cohort began in Fall 2023 and completed three noncredit courses and an internship to earn their certificate.

OCC students enrolled in the Community Health Worker program develop the education and skills needed to become community health workers, including health promotion education, culturally based mindful communication, social support and mentoring, and resource management.

Courses are noncredit and tuition-free. Students should have an intermediate level of English and need a high school diploma or GED by program completion. The coursework will take approximately two semesters to complete, and most courses are offered in a hybrid modality.

## Orange Coast College and U.S. Coast Guard Forge Partnership to Boost Students' Career Prospects

The Coast Community College District Board of Trustees signed a partnership between Orange Coast College and the United States Coast Guard on Wednesday, May 15, to develop a recruitment pathway and a Direct Enlistment Lateral Entry Program. This program will pave the way for OCC graduates to embark on rewarding careers with a higher starting pay salary and greater responsibility.

OCC's partnership with the U.S. Coast Guard signifies a significant step forward in bridging the gap between education and career readiness.

"We are thrilled to partner with the U.S. Coast Guard to offer our students unparalleled opportunities for success," says OCC President Angelica Suarez. "This collaboration recognizes the tremendous value OCC provides in preparing students for rewarding careers. Together, we will equip the leaders of tomorrow to make a positive impact on our nation."

OCC students who complete an associate degree in the Professional Mariner Program (Boatswain's Mate) or an associate degree in Culinary Arts (Culinary Specialist) will be eligible for direct enlistment in the Coast Guard as a Petty Officer Third Class (E-4) or Petty Officer Second Class (E-5), based on final determination by the Coast Guard.

In keeping with the Coast Guard's motto of "Semper Paratus" (Always Ready), OCC's educational programs meet the high standards of readiness required by this multi-mission, maritime, sea-going service. OCC curricula were reviewed by Coast Guard leadership who assessed the quality of learning outcomes. They found that OCC produces graduates who have the competence and confidence to lead self and others while answering the call to duty. OCC graduates will be members of a humanitarian service that saves life at sea, protects our nation from harm, and protects our global ocean by enforcing law to preserve the ocean ecosystem.

Through this partnership, the Coast Guard can develop qualified personnel through OCC programs. Students enrolling from OCC will have their coursework pre-approved by the Coast Guard, allowing them to enter at a higher pay grade.

One of the key highlights of this partnership is the promise of greater responsibility and a higher starting pay salary for OCC students who choose to pursue careers in the Coast Guard. By recognizing the value of education and skills acquired through OCC's programs, the Coast Guard is demonstrating its commitment to attracting top talent and rewarding dedication to service.

The partnership between OCC and the Coast Guard exemplifies the transformative power of collaboration between academia and employers to attract and retain top talent.





## OCC Honors Student Thu Phung Awarded National Transfer Scholarship

Thu Phung, an honors student at Orange Coast College, is one of 60 high-achieving community college students selected to receive the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation’s Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship. The highly competitive national scholarship can provide Phung with as much as \$55,000 a year to complete a bachelor’s degree.

Phung was announced as the 2024 Cooke Undergraduate Transfer Scholar during the College’s annual Honors Night ceremony on May 8.

“We are immensely proud of Thu Phung for being one of only 60 students selected nationwide to receive this prestigious transfer scholarship,” says OCC President Angelica Suarez. “Her dedication, intellect, and commitment to excellence serve as a testament to the quality of education and opportunities available at OCC.”

A Garden Grove resident, Phung began attending OCC in Fall 2021. Phung, a first-generation college student, juggles her schooling and many commitments to her local community, including being a Vietnamese language tutor at her church. She’s an active member of the Phi Theta Kappa honor society and the STEM and National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) clubs at OCC, where she holds active leadership positions.

Phung’s personal college experience has underscored the significance of mental health, prompting her to take a proactive role as the secretary of the NAMI Club. In this capacity, she co-hosts meetings to raise awareness about mental health maintenance

among college students and provides resources for those in need of additional support. Recently, she got to design exclusive NAMI stickers for fundraising on OCC’s Coast Day.

Additionally, Phung currently serves as the vice president of the STEM Club. As vice president, Phung works with a board member team to plan weekly meetings with hands-on activities to foster a common ground for OCC students to connect and build their creativity. In addition to keeping track of the club’s members and volunteers, Phung also contributes to planning the club’s presentations during school’s events, such as OCC’s Science Night and Club Rush.

A mathematics major with a 3.89 GPA, Phung plans to transfer to the University of California Los Angeles in Fall 2024 to pursue a degree in mechanical engineering.

This year’s competition saw nearly 1,700 applications from over 380 community colleges. Applicants were evaluated on their academic prowess, financial need, persistence, community service, and leadership qualities.

## OCC Handed Out More Than \$700,000 in Scholarships at 66th Honors Night

Orange Coast College awarded \$737,300 in scholarships at the 66th Honors Night on May 8.

Honors Night activities began with a Student Service and Leadership Award ceremony in the College Center Ballroom followed by a light buffet outside of the Robert B. Moore Theatre. The celebration concluded with Scholarship Awards ceremony in the Robert B. Moore Theatre.

Honors Night has been a tradition at Orange Coast College for more than six decades. The evening recognizes students who have achieved top honors in academics as well as service and leadership to the College and community.

