



PRESIDENT'S REPORT

DECEMBER
2025


REPORT FROM SUPERINTENDENT/PRESIDENT KARAS



This final report of the calendar year comes just after the close of the fall semester. Students wrapped up their classes last week, and faculty are now putting the finishing touches on grades. Earlier this month, I joined faculty member **Brianna Zuber** at the **Pacific Coast**

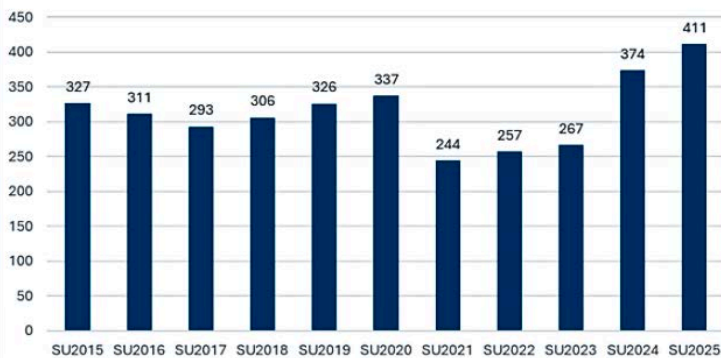
Ocean Initiative (PCOR) annual convening. Mendocino College is part of an **\$18 million NOAA-funded Nature Conservancy grant**, which supports our work to develop a new certificate and degree program in marine ecosystem restoration, as well as a Pacific Corps pilot in partnership with the California Conservation Corps.


Our **student housing project** is also moving forward through key local approval steps. Because construction requires removing existing buildings on the Perkins/Main property, we submitted a demolition permit, which has now been approved by the Ukiah Demolition Review Committee. The next step is presenting it to the Ukiah City Council, potentially in January, for final approval. This will allow us to prepare a shovel-ready site for the State grant application due in June 2026. Thank you to **Nicole Marin** and **Mac Lojowsky** for joining me at the committee meeting and helping address the questions that came up.

Finally, **congratulations to Men's Basketball Coach Billy Offill**, who achieved his **250th career victory** during the annual Ed Boyle Classic here at Mendocino College. **The team secured third place** in the tournament with a win over College of the Siskiyous. 


REPORT FROM SUPERINTENDENT/PRESIDENT KARAS

Summer Session FTES

**ENROLLMENT**


As we close out the summer session we reflect on its growth year over year. Summer session is a time when many students take classes to stay on track to complete their goals, and high school students enroll to jump-start their college experience. Overall, enrollment in summer session continues to increase. As noted in the chart below, Summer 2025 and Summer 2024 were both record years for the college. This has been enabled by deliberate planning of course offerings and delivery of services at all our locations, and exceptional learning opportunities taught by our faculty. In the past, summer session was commonly viewed as a “slow time” in the calendar year. That is now relegated to the past. Our dedicated employees serve our students and community year-round. 

CAREER ACADEMIES

In collaboration with our K12 Pathway Coordinator and Director of Employer Partnerships, Mendocino College faculty led several Career Academies for high school students. The academy's focus areas were sustainable construction, culinary arts, physical therapy assistant, and cybersecurity. Thank you to the faculty lead instructors, **Petti, Pai, and Woodhouse**. Students from Round Valley, South Valley, Clearlake (Lakeport), and Fort Bragg participated. 

WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL

Our team's final season game was on November 14 against Contra Costa. Winning that game, we tied for second in our conference standings. **Four members of the team were selected as the 2025 Bay Valley All-Conference Team.** Congratulations on a great season and the four all-conference players:

- **Cora Holly**- Middle Hitter
- **Jayden Paulich**- Setter
- **Cali Schabl**- Libero
- **Makayla Mace**- Outside Hitter 






MENDOCINO COLLEGE LAKE CENTER CDV SPANISH COHORT CELEBRATION

The Mendocino College Lake Center was honored to host recognition for our third cohort of students completing a four-course Child Development series taught entirely in Spanish. Completion of this series qualifies students to meet the industry requirement to work in a child care facility as Associate Teachers. While completing the child development coursework, students are also enrolled in ESL classes to support their confidence and transition into English-language child development courses.

With the success of the program at the Lake Center, the model has expanded to include instruction offered via Zoom or through on-ground faculty at each of our campuses. This year, we proudly recognized 22 students from across our district who completed the program. For the first time, we were also honored to welcome a **student guest speaker, Ruth Nuñez Pabst**, who completed the Spanish-language pathway, transitioned into English-language child development courses, and will earn her AA next

Spring 2026. During the event, Ruth shared, "We are here because the college gave us an opportunity, and the teacher gave us her support and her dedication. I know it has not been easy, I know we are tired and would rather be sleeping, but we choose to study. We study to be an example to both our children and our family. My experience as a student has been the best. Thanks to what I learned, I have been able to grow professionally in my job. I have been able to manage situations because I learned how to do so in the classroom. We leave the classrooms with great foundations. It will always be a challenge, especially a challenge within us. The person we have to fight the most is us; the important part is to remember to keep going and keep learning."

None of this work would be possible without our lead instructor, **Angela Cuellar**, Ukiah instructor **Alejandra Duarte Castillo**, the dedicated **Lake Center team** (Center Manager Dariela Lopez, Center Assistants Neydi Rodriguez Zamora and Machiko Shimada, and Retention Specialist Oscar Moreno Peredia), and the support of **Deans Christy Smith and Amanda Xu**.

The success of this program has inspired the Lake Center to expand access into additional disciplines. Beginning this Spring, we will pilot a similar pathway in Administration of Justice. Local police departments have emphasized the importance of bilingual officers, and with staffing shortages in Lake County, this partnership represents a promising opportunity to build a diverse pipeline into public safety careers. 

REPORT FROM SUPERINTENDENT/PRESIDENT KARAS

Mendocino College



FACULTY DIVERSITY

MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

MENDOCINO COLLEGE FACULTY DIVERSITY MENTORSHIP RECRUITMENT

Mendocino College is proud to welcome applications for the second cohort of the Faculty Diversity Mentorship Program. This year-long paid mentorship initiative builds a diverse local pipeline of future faculty through a **\$2,500 stipend, structured mentoring, and professional development for emerging educators** with at least an Associate's degree. Developed collaboratively by **Dean Amanda Xu, Program Coordinator Marcello Bice, and Human Resources**, the program prepares participants for part-time teaching roles. Following a successful inaugural year, the program has refined its curriculum, expanded outreach through campus information sessions, and strengthened alignment with faculty hiring practices to support the College's goals around equity, access, and workforce development.

Interested parties may [apply for the Faculty Diversity Mentorship Program here](#). 




MENDOCINO COLLEGE
EOPS • CARE • NextUp

EOPS/CARE/ NEXTUP

This semester marked a significant achievement for our support programs. EOPS, CARE, and NextUp served a record number of students for fall semester, **reflecting an 8.4% growth for EOPS, 18% growth for CARE, and 6.7% growth for NextUp** compared to last fall.

- **New Students:** Welcomed 198 students new to EOPS, 22 students new to CARE, and 5 students new to NextUp, expanding access to vital resources and support.
- **Retention:** Successfully retained 331 EOPS students, 37 CARE students, and 11 NextUp students from Spring 2025, demonstrating strong persistence and engagement.
- **Current Focus:** Actively reaching out to 188 EOPS students, 25 CARE students, and 8 NextUp students who have not yet enrolled in Spring courses to ensure continued success.
- **Counseling Accessibility:** Increased drop-in availability to meet growing demand, especially around drop and registration dates.

These accomplishments showcase the dedication of our team and the resilience of our students in pursuing their educational goals. 




FINANCIAL AID

The Financial Aid Office is excited to announce that they are **now offering Zoom drop-in sessions** to make support more accessible for students at our Center locations. Zoom drop-ins were offered on December 2nd, 9th, and 16th from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. For the Zoom link and future drop-in session dates, please visit the [Financial Aid webpage](#).


Benefits of offering Zoom drop-in sessions:

- Students can connect with financial aid advisors from anywhere via Zoom.
- No appointment needed, just join during scheduled hours.
- Designed to serve students at our center locations who may not be able to visit the main office.

We understand that navigating financial aid can be challenging. By offering Zoom drop-ins, we're removing barriers and ensuring every student has the opportunity to get timely help with applications, forms, and questions. 

NATIVE NOW: K'EDI WADDIM OPENS AT MENDOCINO COLLEGE ART GALLERY

Mendocino College Art Gallery unveiled its Native Now: K'edi Waddim on Thursday, Nov. 20th. This collaboration between the Art Gallery and Native Staff saw the curation of Indigenous Art, showcasing Native American talent. The opening welcomed **251 community members**, with food provided by the **Culinary Department**, the **Native American Club**, and drinks from Tara Riizer's Lemon'AaaaayD! The opening welcome began with speeches made by **curators, Jazzminh Moore, Kyle Whiterock, and Victoria Ramos**.

The exhibition runs through February 8th, 2026, with gallery hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 12:30 PM to 3:30 PM, and Wednesdays from 10:30 AM to 1:30 PM. 




REPORT FROM SUPERINTENDENT/PRESIDENT KARAS

**CLASSIFIED SENATE
HOLIDAY FUNRAISER SUCCESS**

This year's Classified Senate Holiday FunRaiser was a tremendous success, bringing together creativity, generosity, and community spirit in support of student scholarships. With all bid items now picked up and the final numbers tallied, the Classified Senate is pleased to share that the event **raised an impressive \$4,208, surpassing last year's total** of \$3,723.

The fundraiser featured a vibrant mix of activities, including a raffle, silent auction, wine pull, and an array of handcrafted and curated items contributed by staff members across the college. **A total of 310 raffle tickets were sold, and congratulations go to this year's raffle winners: Lisa Caito, Amy Nelson, and Ginny Buccelli.**


The success of the Holiday FunRaiser was **made possible through the generosity of the college's Management Team and Classified staff**, whose donations filled the event's signature wreaths and poinsettias with gift cards, along with the many baskets, handcrafted items, and bottles of wine that completed the silent auction and wine pull. Their time, talent, and contributions helped create an engaging and festive experience for all who participated.

Most importantly, **every dollar raised will go directly toward scholarships** for deserving Mendocino College students, supporting their continued progress toward educational and career goals. This annual event stands as a testament to the dedication and care our staff bring to the college community and the powerful impact we can make when we work together. 

**PRIDE SOCIALS OFFER CONNECTION & COMMUNITY AHEAD OF THE HOLIDAYS**

Mendocino College's Pride Social events, held on Tuesday, November 25, and Tuesday, December 2, created a warm and welcoming space for students to connect during a busy and often emotionally complex time of year. Although attendance was modest, the atmosphere was lively, relaxed, and genuinely appreciated by those who participated—especially during Thanksgiving week, when many students remain on campus or in the community without their usual support networks.

Across both events, approximately fourteen students took part, sharing conversation, laughter, music, and games. These moments of connection offered students a chance to unwind, make new friends, and strengthen the sense of belonging that is central to Mendocino College's commitment to an inclusive campus climate.

The Pride Socials continue to serve as an important touchpoint for LGBTQ+ students and allies, reminding our community that supportive spaces—no matter the size—play a meaningful role in student well-being. As the semester concludes, these gatherings highlight the value of creating consistent opportunities for students to feel seen, supported, and celebrated. 



CELEBRATING NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH WITH STORYTELLING

On November 20, Mendocino College hosted its annual Storytelling Night in the Little Theatre, bringing together students, families, and community members for an inspiring celebration of Native American Heritage Month. The event was led by **Professor Lori Laiwa Thomas** (Hopland Pomo, Ethnic Studies Instructor), whose leadership and cultural insight shaped an evening dedicated to honoring tradition, creativity, and community.

This Year's Theme: Indigenous Digital Storytelling

The program highlighted how Native artists are blending cultural knowledge with modern creative tools to bring their stories to life. Attendees enjoyed powerful keynote presentations by Jocelyn Garcia and Eric Wilder, whose work illustrated the evolving landscape of Indigenous art and storytelling.

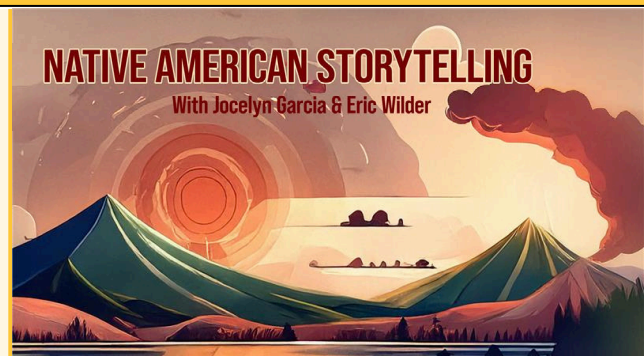
Why It Matters

First nationally recognized in 1990, Native American Heritage Month honors the enduring histories, living cultures, and contributions of Indigenous peoples. Storytelling remains central to Native communities, serving as a vessel for history, humor, teachings, & identity.

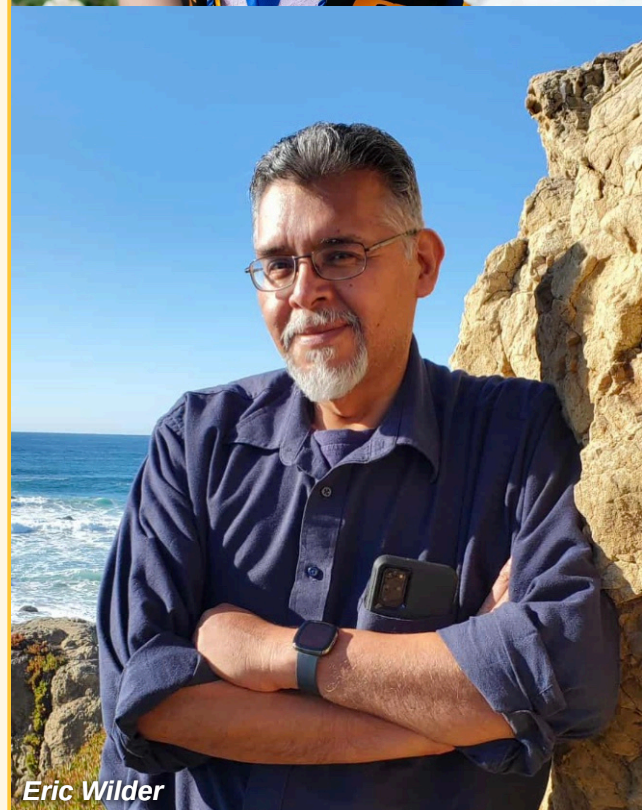
Spotlight on Featured Storytellers

- **Jocelyn Garcia**, an Indigenous digital storyteller and illustrator, shared her journey and her award-winning animated thesis film *Tule*, which has been featured at 26 film festivals worldwide. *Tule* tells the story of a modern Pomo girl who reconnects with the culturally significant and endangered tule plant of Clear Lake.
- **Eric Wilder**, freelance artist and member of the Kashia Band of Pomo Indians, reflected on cultural leadership and community history. His digital and graphic artwork celebrates Indigenous resilience and innovation. Eric has served his community as a fire tender, feather dancer, and Big Head Dancer. He currently serves as President of the Gualala Arts Center Board of Directors and is the founder of the Native Arts Expo.

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Jocelyn Garcia




Eric Wilder


*Native American Storytelling Continued...***A Night of Community & Gratitude**

The evening concluded with ceremonial blanket gifts presented by Native American Club (NAC) students to the storytellers—a heartfelt gesture of honor and appreciation. Mendocino College thanks all who contributed to this meaningful event. **Heartfelt appreciation to Rebecca Montes, Mary Houghton, Tony Novelli, Damon Webb, Eric Wilder, Jocelyn Garcia, Loni Zairis** (for her delicious blackberry pies), **Carrie Potter, Amber Shrum, Janet Dougherty, and the dedicated volunteers of the Native American Club (NAC)**, and to the many people who attended this celebration.

This celebration reaffirmed the power of collaboration, the resilience of Indigenous traditions, and the enduring importance of storytelling—whether spoken beside a fire or crafted through digital media. As new generations of Indigenous artists continue to innovate, their stories remain deeply rooted in community, identity, and connection to the land.


May these stories inspire us to listen deeply, create boldly, and continue sharing our own stories in the spirit of community and connection. 

ATHLETICS COUNSELING

Alicia Mendoza and **Jose Venegas Hernandez** have partnered with the **Athletic Director Matt Gordon** to offer regular group workshops for our student athletes. These sessions provide timely, informative guidance on academic planning, eligibility requirements, and the steps needed to stay in good standing. They also support students' athletic and transfer goals as they prepare for opportunities at the university level. Strong collaboration with the coaching staff has contributed to high participation and has reinforced the value of these workshops for the teams they serve. 

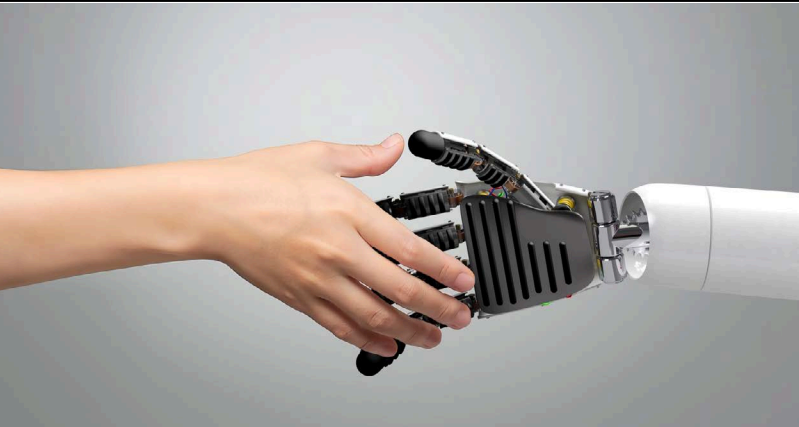
**MENDOCINO COLLEGE****CalWORKs****EDUCATION THAT WORKS!****CALWORKS**

The number of Lake and Mendocino County participants in the Welfare-to-Work program has continued to rise, with each semester showing notable growth. **We are now serving an average of 100+ students per term**—an impressive increase compared to our post-COVID participation levels. We're excited to see what Spring of 2026 brings. This growth is illustrated in the corresponding chart below.

Welfare-to-Work programs provide vital support to participants seeking to build long-term stability through education. By connecting individuals with resources such as academic counseling, financial assistance, childcare, and career planning, these programs help reduce barriers to enrolling in and completing community college. Through this partnership, participants gain the skills, confidence, and opportunities needed to pursue meaningful careers and achieve lasting success. 

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Fall	65	106	99
Spring	80	119	TBD


REPORT FROM SUPERINTENDENT/PRESIDENT KARAS

**MONTHLY AI LUNCH & LEARN SERIES
SUPPORTS INNOVATION ACROSS CAMPUS**


Mendocino College Information Technology has launched a new monthly **AI Lunch & Learn** series designed to help employees explore practical ways artificial intelligence can support their daily work. The informal sessions offer a welcoming space to share useful tools, demonstrate creative solutions, and discuss challenges or ideas that participants haven't yet figured out but hope to tackle with AI.

Held on Zoom on the first Tuesday of each month from 12:30–1:20 p.m., the series provides a convenient opportunity for faculty, staff, and administrators to learn from one another and build confidence in using emerging technologies. **Upcoming meeting dates include January 6, February 3, March 3, April 7, and May 5.**

Whether you are already experimenting with AI or simply curious about how it might enhance your role, all are encouraged to join. The sessions continue to grow as a collaborative space for learning, problem-solving, and developing new ways to work more efficiently and creatively.

To join an upcoming meeting, please follow the link to the Zoom classroom here. 

**RETENTION**

The retention team continues to connect and follow up with students on their journeys. Recent efforts have centered on supporting students in completing their required Comprehensive Education Plans. Of the 70 students contacted, 36 have received follow-up assistance from the team. The team has also begun outreach to first-time, first-semester students to encourage continued enrollment for the Spring 2026 term, reinforcing overall persistence goals. They **initiated contact with 248 students** and are focusing on that high-touch support to close the loop. 



REPORT FROM SUPERINTENDENT/PRESIDENT KARAS



MENDOCINO COLLEGE



Dr. Victor Hernandez pictured Center with the 2016 Mendocino College Men's Soccer Team

HISPANIC/LATINX ALUMNI SUCCESS STORIES

As part of our Alumni Spotlight series, the Mendocino College Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) staff is proud to feature **Dr. Victor Hernandez**.

Born and raised in Ukiah, California, Victor never imagined attending college. Today, he holds a Doctorate in Physical Therapy—a testament to his *ganas* (desire), strong work ethic, and dedication to serving his community.

Victor's Higher Education Journey

Victor grew up with a strong work ethic, inspired by parents who worked tirelessly, often holding multiple jobs to make ends meet. When old enough, he joined the workforce to help support his family. While neither parent completed past middle school in Mexico, Victor's drive to change his family's status pushed him further. He excelled academically in high school, fueled by curiosity and engagement in the MESA program at Ukiah High.


After high school, Victor attended Mendocino College, joining the CAMP program and finding support through counselors, tutors at the Learning Center, and the college's close-knit environment. He was also one of the first players on the Men's Soccer team, which became a key support system throughout his studies.

After high school, Victor attended Mendocino College, joining the CAMP program and finding support through counselors, tutors at the Learning Center, and the college's close-knit environment. He was also one of the first players on the Men's Soccer team, which became a key support system throughout his studies.

After earning his Allied Health degree, Victor transferred to the University of Saint Mary in Kansas, continuing academics and soccer. He later returned to California to complete his bachelor's degree at Sonoma State University. When Mendocino College launched its **first Physical Therapy Assistant (PTA) cohort**, Victor returned and graduated with the inaugural class in 2021.

While working as a PTA, Victor saw the critical need for Latino healthcare providers, especially for Spanish-speaking patients. Motivated to better serve his community, he pursued and completed his Doctor of Physical Therapy at Hawai'i Pacific University in 2024.

Victor's Inspiration and Advice


Victor credits his parents and his desire to uplift his community as his greatest motivations. He hopes current students chase their goals with determination, acknowledging that while college can be challenging, it's important to give it your all, or as he says, "*echarle ganas*." 



CULINARY ARTS ACADEMY CONCLUDES SEASON WITH HANDS-ON LEARNING

The final Career Academy of the season brought students from Fort Bragg High School, Willits High School, and South Valley High School to Mendocino College's Culinary Kitchen for an immersive introduction to the Culinary Arts Management (CAM) program. **Led by Chef Pedersen**, a Mendocino College instructor and local business owner, students practiced essential skills such as metric measurement, kitchen safety, and the soft skills that help cooks "win friends and influence people." Chef Pedersen also shared insights from operating his two Ramen Cubed restaurants in Ukiah and Willits.


Chef Josh from the Munchery, a CAM program alumnus, joined the session to share his own path from student to business owner, giving students a clear example of where the CAM program can lead. Students then prepared shortbread cookies and frosting, toured the construction and agriculture departments, and sampled persimmons, pineapple guava, and a very hot pequin pepper—connecting culinary practice to agriculture and food production. The day concluded with participants sharing their favorite dishes and kitchen experiences.

Mendocino College hopes to welcome these students back as future Culinary Arts Management majors. 

FALL CAREER ACADEMIES CONNECT STUDENTS TO CAREER PATHWAYS

This fall, K12 Pathway Coordinator **Megan Tunzi** and Director of Employer Partnerships **Pamela Heston-Bechtol** hosted four Career Academy events for local high school students, offering four-hour hands-on sessions in **Sustainable Construction, Physical Therapy Assistant, Computer Science/Cybersecurity**, and **Culinary Arts Management**. Students from Round Valley, South Valley, Willits, Fort Bragg, and Lakeport Unified gained new skills, learned about educational pathways, and met industry partners who shared real-world insight into each profession.

The college extends its thanks to the industry professionals who supported these sessions: **Dr. Hernandez** (Private PT and Alum) and Dr. Ortiz (Adventist Health) for the PTA Academy; Steve Single (Mendocino County Savings Bank) and Tom Johnson (DHS) for the Cybersecurity Academy; and **Chef Joshua Landes** (The Munchery and Alum) for Culinary Arts Management. Part-time faculty and alumni **Nick Johnson** (Owner of Nick Johnson Construction, LLC, and Alum) and Chef Pedersen (Owner of Ramen Cubed) also led their respective academies.

Looking ahead, spring sessions will focus on Automotive Technology, Agriculture, EMT, and additional SCT and PTA events on the coast, with more offerings possible. 



HUMAN RESOURCES CORNER

Human Resources at Mendocino College provides a supportive atmosphere to all current and future employees. Your friendly Human Resources Team would like to highlight some useful links:

Check Out Open Positions

- [Employment Opportunities](#)


Training Opportunities

- [Training with Keenan SafeColleges](#)
- [Vision Resource Center](#)

Access Collective Bargaining Agreements

- [Collective Bargaining Agreements](#)

Retirement Links

- [CalPERS - Classified Employees and Managers](#)
- [CalSTRS - Certificated Employees & Educational Administrators](#)
- [403\(b\) Supplemental Retirement](#) 



EVENTS

Details can be viewed on the [Events page](#), or the [Athletics page](#). The monthly [student newsletter, The Eagle](#), provides a listing of upcoming events and campus news too.

TAG! You're In! Tuesdays | Every Tuesday

Produce Wednesdays | Every Wednesday

Weaving Wednesdays | 3rd Wednesday of the month

Walking Moai | Every Thursday

Native Now | Nov. 20, 2025-Feb. 8, 2026

Nutcracker Ballet | Dec. 19-21

Winter Closure | Dec. 24, 2025-Jan. 1, 2026

Spring Semester Begins | Jan. 20

MLACE Community Partners Lunch | Jan. 23

UCCA Professional Pianists Concert | Jan. 23-25

Krenov School Mid-Winter Show | Jan. 31-Feb. 8

Ukiah Symphony Orchestra | Feb. 7-8

Cal Poly Humboldt Painters | Feb. 19-Mar. 23 

