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Contact: Marilyn Grinsdale

Office: 626-914-8824

Citrus College Receives Grant from National Science Foundation

For the first time in its institutional history, Citrus College has been awarded a grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF).

The \$406,321 award will be used to fund, "GP-EXTRA: Bridge to the Geosciences for Community College Students." This collaborative project is designed to increase the number of STEM students exposed to career opportunities available within the geosciences.

"Citrus College will be working with the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) and the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research (UCAR), two world renowned institutions, to expose a diverse population of early college students to the wide range of career pathways the geosciences afford," said Dr. Marianne Smith, director of STEM grants at Citrus College and the project's principal investigator. "This creative and original partnership leverages the strengths and resources available at each institution and provides students with the opportunity to work with science mentors and collaborators who are at the forefront of their respective disciplines."

As part of the project, students will participate in experiential learning "geomodules" organized around four different subfields of the geosciences: the planetary, atmospheric, oceanic, and environmental sciences. These geomodules will include research activities with scientists at the Oak Crest Institute of Science in Monrovia, Calif.; JPL in Pasadena, Calif.; the Center for Dark Energy Biosphere Investigations in Catalina, Calif.; and UCAR in Boulder, CO.

The project will engage 20 Citrus College students annually for the next three years. Participants will apply for the unique opportunity, which will include a weekend spent learning about research in the deep seafloor biosphere in Catalina and ten days immersed in atmospheric research, training, and fieldwork in Boulder. As part of the project, participants will also be required to share their knowledge with other STEM students at Citrus College

"Through these catalytic experiences, students will deepen their knowledge of the geosciences, come to understand the multiple entry points into the field, and build valuable professional skills and networks," Smith explained. "The United States is not graduating enough students in the geosciences to meet the growing demand. Our hope is that this exciting project will promote an interest in the geosciences and encourage students to consider pursuing a career in this multi-disciplinary field."

The NSF grant is the most recent recognition Citrus College's STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) Program has received during fall 2015. Earlier in the semester, Citrus College was selected to receive a five-year grant of more than one million dollars from the U.S. Department of Education to fund a TRiO STEM Student Support Services project designed to increase the retention, graduation, and transfer rates of STEM majors. And, just last month, Citrus College's STEM Summer Research Program (SRE) received the 2015 Student Success Award by California Community College Chancellor Brice W. Harris.

“The significance of the science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields to the economic competitiveness and growth of the United States is well-known. There is an ever-growing demand for college graduates in these vital fields and Citrus College has been at the forefront of meeting this national need,” said Dr. Geraldine M. Perri, superintendent/president of Citrus College. “Being selected to receive a prestigious grant from the National Science Foundation is a momentous accomplishment and I commend those who made it possible.”

The GP-EXTRA project is expected to be transformative for both its participants and the Citrus College community as a whole. It will enhance a program that has already received national acclaim and achieved significant success.

“Over the past six years, Citrus College has seen a 237 percent increase in STEM degree production, a 126 percent increase in STEM transfers to CSU and UC campuses, and a tripling in the number of STEM majors at the institution,” said Mrs. Susan M. Keith, president of the Citrus Community College District Board of Trustees. “Our STEM Program is a prime example of Citrus College’s commitment to student success and college completion. I have no doubt that it will continue to inspire students in the years to come.”