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El Camino College | Public Relations & Marketing Department  
16007 Crenshaw Blvd., Torrance, CA 90506  
Contact: Ann M. Garten, Director, Community Relations  
Telephone: (310) 660-3406 | Email: [agarten@elcamino.edu](mailto:agarten@elcamino.edu)

**For Immediate Release**

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## **El Camino College Graduation Initiative to Complete Five Years of Student Success**

The El Camino College Graduation Initiative has made significant progress in the past five years, with increased numbers of students succeeding in reading, writing and math courses and earning degrees at an increased rate.

The initiative was supported by a five-year, \$3.24 million grant, which will come to a close on September 30. It was designed to provide support services to help more students earn an associate degree in a reasonable amount of time.

Strengthening student learning and faculty teaching in essential gateway courses such as reading, writing, and math were key components of the project. Tutoring, counseling and preparation programs were also created to help build students' skills and expedite the transition from developmental courses to college-level courses.

One Graduation Initiative program that was especially helpful to mechanical engineering major Jenny Rodriguez is the ECC Summer Math Academy. This intensive math review program helps prepare students for math placement tests. Jenny said that participating in the Math Academy saved her from taking five extra math courses.

She had completed a calculus class in high school, but while taking her placement test at El Camino College, she realized she had forgotten basic math rules, and placed in a class much less advanced than she was expecting, setting her schedule for graduation back by two-and-a-half years.

By luck, Jenny saw a flier for the Summer Math Academy and decided to give it a try. When she took the math placement test again she placed into college-level calculus – a course that transfers to a four-year college or university. Jenny has received A's in all her math courses since then.

“The Math Academy is a very intense course that gives you tools to succeed,” said Jenny, who is now a math tutor. “I am absolutely sure that the Math Academy has changed the lives of thousands of students. It certainly changed mine.”

Increases were seen in all areas of the Graduation Initiative: there were more first-time/full-time, degree-seeking freshman students graduating with an associate degree within three years of enrollment; more students enrolled in transfer-level courses; and the number of transfer-ready students soared.

Additionally, the initiative helped to close the graduation gap of Hispanic students from 12 percent to 9 percent, providing access to college classes and support services to this group of students.

Since the beginning of the Graduation Initiative, the number of online student education plans has increased by more than 500 percent. Creating an education plan is an important part of helping students stay on track toward meeting their academic and/or career goals. Planning also helps students connect to college resources and support services, identify skills/interests, and transition into a career or four-year college or university.

Faculty learning teams in the humanities and math academic areas experienced an increase in faculty participation during the past five years, giving them the chance to improve teaching strategies and enhance best practices, resulting in improved student retention and success rates.

The Reading Success Center was also introduced by the Graduation Initiative and continues to serve a growing number of students. In order to meet the high demand for services, the hours of operation have been extended and the Reading Success Center has been open for the past two summers for the first time.

Additionally, the Graduation Initiative provided support to Supplemental Instruction coaches, FATV (online financial aid instructional videos), online math practice tests, and extended hours for the college's Writing Center. These programs will remain on campus to help students reach their goals.

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