

EDUCATION

LOCAL COLLEGES IN THE NEWS

HCC awards first 'Bienvenidos' Latinx scholarships

HOLYOKE - Holyoke Community College has awarded its inaugural "Bienvenidos" Latinx scholarships to 20 new and returning students from Holyoke and surrounding communities.

Each student will receive \$2,500 they can apply toward tuition, fees, books or other college expenses for the 2021-2022 academic year.

The scholarship recipients were celebrated during a special reception in the HCC Campus Center on Saturday, Aug. 28.

"It is a pleasure to be here with you and your families sharing this special moment as we recognize your commitment to your educations," said Elsie Rodriguez-Garcia, director of HCC's TRIO Student Support Services and chair of the college's Hispanic Leadership Committee. "As a Hispanic Serving Institution, we are honored that you have chosen Holyoke Community College. As an HCC student, you will be connected to mentors, workshops and support services to ensure your academic success. We want you to be educated, inspired and connected as you continue your studies by exploring and expressing your Latinidad."

As part of this year's celebration of HCC's 75th anniversary, the HCC Foundation allocated \$75,000 to create the Bienvenidos Latinx Scholarship Fund. During this initial year, scholarships worth a total of \$50,000 were distributed to 20 eligible Latinx students. The remaining \$25,000 was set aside in an endowed fund for future years.

Bienvenidos was chosen as the name of the scholarship program because it means "welcome" in Spanish. One of the goals of the scholarship program is to increase retention rates and reduce achievement gaps for Latinx students. Beyond the direct financial support, scholarship recipients will be connected to peer and alumni mentors and workshops to ensure their ongoing success.

"As one of our Latinx scholarship



Jamil Roman of Holyoke (pictured with his mother Mabeline Burgos) is one of 20 HCC students to receive the inaugural Bienvenidos Latinx Scholarships.



Brenda Conde, second from right, accepts her Bienvenidos scholarship from Elsie Rodriguez-Garcia, left, chair of HCC's Hispanic Leadership Committee; Amanda Sbriscia, executive director of the HCC Foundation; and Christina Royal, president of HCC.

awardees stated in his essay, "Holyoke Community College is where you can believe que sí, se puede!" (that yes, you can)," said Rodriguez-Garcia.

HCC marked a major milestone in 2016 when the U.S. Department of Education recognized the college as a Hispanic Serving Institution, which means at least 25 percent of its students identify as Hispanic, Latina/o, or Latinx.

"This scholarship is an acknowledgement of your identity as Latinx individuals and a recognition that is going to be part of the cultural context in which you learn," said President Christina Royal. "I'm so happy that we have a group of faculty and staff here today dedicated to helping you get started on your path at HCC in a way that recognizes that identity and who have developed a program designed to help you be successful."

The 2021-2022 Bienvenidos Latinx Scholarship recipients are:

From Amherst: Cristobal Rodriguez (Criminal Justice);

From Chicopee: Mackenzie Lara, (Foundations of Health); Xiomara Rivera (Communications, Media, Theater Arts);

From Holyoke: Miren Neyra Alcantara (Latinx Studies); Mia Almodovar (Liberal Arts); Eris Santiago Bigas (Liberal Arts); Jazlynn Brown-Pena (Psychology); Gloryann Lebron (Secondary Education); Aida Lema Portes (Early Childhood Education); Jamil Roman (Communication, Media, Theater Arts); Bianca Shea (Business Administration); Mercedes Ventura (Medical Assistant);

From Springfield: Brenda Conde (Liberal Arts); Jeremy Gongora (Business Administration); Zuheily Gonzalez (Foundations of Health); Brianna Melendez (Psychology); Angel Vargas (Computer Science).

From Ware: Vianca Diaz (Biology);

From Westfield: Lyla Roybal (Foundations of Health). ■