

John W. Rice Diversity & Equity Award

RESPONSES to NOMINATION QUESTIONS

NOMINEE: Dr. Audrey Yamagata-Noji, *Vice President, Student Services, Mt. San Antonio College*

1. Describe the nominated person who demonstrates a significant and outstanding contribution to advancing diversity and equity.

Audrey is a peerless state and national leader in the areas of access for all, diversity and equity. For all of her distinguished career as an executive college administrator, she has been an **advocate and champion for student equity** and for diversity issues with the goal of providing students equal access to educational opportunities, facilities, and resources that foster student success. For over 30 years, Audrey has been in the trenches, **blazing new trails and creating models** for programs and services that provide access to underserved student populations—with respect to ethnicity, gender, and disabilities. This also includes military veterans. **She is a smart, resourceful leader**, skilled in establishing effective learning communities that facilitate the transition and retention of underprepared freshmen into college; strengthen their preparation for college-level instruction and success; and facilitate their transfer to universities and/or the workforce. **Audrey is a skillful collaborator**, which enables her to bridge student services and the faculty and leverage their resources to meet the objectives of Mt. San Antonio College's Student Equity and Equity for All initiatives. **Audrey possesses a sixth sense for cultivating diversity** and constantly innovates fresh approaches to student engagement and inclusion. As President Scroggins notes in his letter of recommendation, Audrey *"personifies dedication to the constructs of this [Rice] award—diversity and equity."*

2. How has the nominated person measurably fostered employees' and/or students' opportunity to embrace and promote diversity and/or equity?

Audrey has achieved this through her leadership role as Vice President of Student services, as co-chair of the college's Equity for All Initiative, and through her partnership with the Student Equity Initiative. Through these initiatives, she has fostered the goal of providing an educational environment that is welcoming, supportive, and accessible to all participants, regardless of ethnicity, culture, nationality, language, disability, gender, sexual orientation or religion to ensure that all students have an equitable opportunity for student success. Through her leadership of committees that focus on these initiatives, she has been able to advocate for the underrepresented and to give them a voice and a place at the table of access and equity. As a result, **Mt. SAC has established a culture of inclusion that proactively reaches out to all populations and fosters engagement.** Audrey's advocacy and leadership transcend the Mt. SAC boundaries to regional and state levels, where she has galvanized support and influenced public policy re: diversity and equity initiatives. She willingly shares her knowledge, insights, and passion with other stakeholders, policymakers, legislators, the media, as well as community college leaders—challenging them to meet the needs of the most invisible students.

3. What measureable advances or progress has been made in the last 12 months as a direct result of the person?

Over the past year, essential updates to the college's *Student Equity Plan* were well underway and efforts are in progress to address findings from the *Equity for All Report*, which was prepared in conjunction with the University of Southern California's Center for Urban Education. Audrey has been spearheading efforts to address noted inconsistencies and to close gaps in achievement for certain student ethnic groups. This entails incorporating equity and diversity measures into the college's processes to develop Student Learning Outcomes, General Education Outcomes, and the Basic Skills Plan.

With respect to the learning communities and affinity groups Audrey has established:

BRIDGE PROGRAM: This phenomenally popular and successful program, which Audrey established over a decade ago, has made significant strides in empowering freshmen who are entering Mt. SAC at the basic skills level and have self-identified challenges/barriers to succeed in college. This learning community structure enables students to take an active role in teaching/learning and incorporates an integrated curricular approach. Bridge employs learner-centered pedagogical techniques and provides a peer-group experience and a network of support: peer advisors/mentors, faculty, and tutors. Success rates for Bridge courses now range from 80% to 100% and 98% of Summer Bridge students persist to the fall semester. The unique aspect of the Bridge Program (whose dominant population is Latino) is the

intentional integration of counseling into the program and the strong partnership between Student Services and Instruction—a collaboration that Audrey forged. ***The program has been fully embraced across the college*** and has been showcased at student support conferences (ranging from the RP Group Student Success Conference to the College Board). Bridge recently won the *Mt. SAC Presidential Award for Outstanding Basic Skills Efforts*.

ARISE PROGRAM: Thanks to Audrey's vision and leadership, Mt. SAC now offers **Arise**, a \$2-million, five-year federally funded program that provides a broad range of support across multiple dimensions to meet the needs of underperforming Asian-American and Pacific Islander students. The program fosters basic skills completion and provides academic tutoring, counseling and advisement, student development, and leadership skill development. In preparing the AANAPISI grant, Audrey demonstrated how among the AAPI student population, certain subgroups are overshadowed and their needs marginalized by the Asian "model minority myth." Over the past year, Audrey launched the pilot for a cultural intervention targeting PI students, who are considered among the most vulnerable, misunderstood, underprepared and underserved group of students. Referred to as the *fale fono* (community meeting house), this intervention evolved as a safe space where students are able to reflect on their community stereotypes, openly discuss concerns about their academic progress and needs, as well as develop a community that promotes positive "peer pressure" to engage, persist, and elevate their personal commitment to their college education.

ASPIRE PROGRAM: During the past year, Audrey allocated additional staffing resources to Mt. SAC's **Aspire** Program, which is designed to boost completion and transfer rates for African-American students.

DISABLED STUDENT ACCESS: Since Audrey arrived at Mt. SAC in 1996, she has been a strong advocate for equity and access for students with physical and learning disabilities. This includes making the physical campus more easily accessible and navigational and ensuring that the learning experience for disabled students is more equitable. Over the past year, Audrey has made significant progress in securing collegewide buy-in for integrating closed captioning as a standard—not an option—in all instructional media. She recently secured much-needed additional space for deaf and hard-of-hearing students and the staff who provide services to this population. During the great California economic recession of 2009-10, Audrey successfully identified "bridge funding" to backfill the **DSPS** budget, which was severely cut by 47%, due to steep statewide categorical funding cuts. This critical stop-gap measure sustained the operation and services to students until funding was recently restored.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS: During the past year, the Mt. SAC **International Student Center** was formally opened, welcoming students from over 40 countries. Audrey is the visionary and architect of the entire program, designed to facilitate the smooth transition of international students into the college and to ensure equity and inclusion for them in the total college experience. The new center serves students' essential academic and matriculation needs and fosters their need for cultural socialization and assimilation.

4. What specific elements make the person effective?

As noted earlier, Audrey is smart, strategic, resourceful, persuasive, and is a highly skilled collaborator who is able to galvanize support behind a strategic initiative. Her passion for student equity and student success is what drives her and inspires stakeholders to get on board. Audrey is an impactful presenter, an exceptional grant writer, and a widely published and respected scholar/expert on equity issues and student success.

5. What measureable impact has the person had on the culture of the students, district's employees and the community it serves?

Audrey's untiring and uncompromising commitment to diversity, equity, student success, and inclusion is branded throughout the college. Her advocacy and effectiveness as a champion for diversity and equity has resulted in the development of a culture of inclusion on the Mt. SAC campus. Inclusion of the underserved is no longer an after-thought but is now the standard (see #2).

6. Include a five-sentence summary of the nominee that would be suitable for public announcement.

President Scroggins said it best: Audrey is "a fierce advocate for the underrepresented and has given them a voice and a place at the educational table. The lives of countless students have been touched by the programs she has developed, policies she has crafted, and personal touch she has provided. If Mt. SAC is the caring institution, it is because of Audrey's unyielding drive to provide a successful educational opportunity for all members of our student body. It is amazing to watch her talk to our diverse students, many times in their own language! Her presence is strong and caring, tough and compassionate. The body of lifetime work Audrey has created in support of our students from every background is unduplicated by any other leader in our system."



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May 21, 2014

Dear Selection Committee,

It is with great pleasure that I write in support of Dr. Audrey Yamagata-Noji's nomination for the Rice Diversity & Equity Award. Audrey has devoted her professional career to issues of diversity, equity, and social justice. She is a fierce advocate for the underrepresented and has given them a voice and a place at the educational table. The lives of countless students have been touched by the programs she has developed, policies she has crafted, and personal touch she has provided.

Audrey's community college professional career began at Long Beach City College, where she was a counselor, instructor, and faculty member. She was subsequently appointed EOPS Director for Saddleback College. While serving in this position, she was also a member of the Chancellor's Office Title 5 Matriculation and EOPS Regulation writing committees, where she impacted the policies which frame how we serve our most vulnerable and at-risk students. She also co-founded the *Leadership Development Program in Higher Education* (LDPHE) program, an intensive leadership development program, which now has thirty years of successful alumni.

Nine years later, Audrey moved to Santa Ana College, serving first as Assistant Dean and then as Dean of Student Services. Under her leadership, outreach services became multi-lingual, parents were included in college-going information sessions, and a pathway between non-credit and credit programs was clearly articulated, serving the Spanish- and Vietnamese-speaking populations of the community by providing them a pathway to college. She championed partnership efforts with feeder K-12 districts, yielding curriculum alignment and improved English and Mathematics placement results. In the middle of these many innovative efforts, Audrey was elected to the Santa Ana Unified Board of Education, where she has served since 1987. She has been a constant and vigilant voice for the underrepresented and underserved in her community, developing programs which serve as models for many other districts.

In 1996, Audrey moved to Mt. San Antonio College, where she serves as Vice President of Student Services. Her vision brought multiple programs to our most at-risk students, including Veterans, high school transition, Asian-American/Pacific Islanders, African-American students, Hispanic students, and student athletes. Each unique program is designed to meet the needs specific to the target population, resulting in a supportive, personalized environment within a large educational institution. Students experience a program customized to their needs, respectful of their culture, and designed to foster academic excellence. Mt. SAC is the caring institution because of Audrey's unyielding drive to provide a successful educational opportunity for all members of our student body. It is amazing to watch her talk to our diverse students, many times in their own language!

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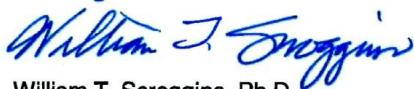
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COLLEGE PRESIDENT & CEO: Dr. William T. Scroggins

Audrey provides leadership beyond the College, presenting at statewide and national conferences, publishing regularly, and serving as the Region 8 representative to the Chief Student Services Officers Executive Board for ten years. She willingly shares her knowledge, insights, and passion with other college and community leaders, mentoring and challenging others to meet the needs of our most invisible students. Her presence is strong and caring, tough and compassionate. The body of lifetime work she has created in support of our students from every background is unduplicated by any other leader in our system. She personifies dedication to the constructs of this award - diversity and equity - and I am honored to present her as a nominee.

Sincerely,

MT. SAN ANTONIO COLLEGE



William T. Scroggins, Ph.D.
President & CEO

WTS:dl



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May 22, 2014

Selection Committee
John W. Rice Diversity & Equity Award
Foundation for California Community Colleges

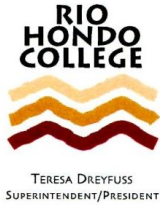
Dear Selection Committee,

I am pleased and honored to provide a letter of recommendation for **Dr. Audrey Yamagata-Noji**, a nominee for the prestigious John W. Rice Diversity & Equity Award. I have known Audrey over 25 years in varying capacities, and I believe she truly demonstrates and exemplifies the spirit and the meaning of the award.

First, let me cite her 25 years of experience on the Santa Ana Unified School District Board and her overall commitment to excellence in the K-12 segment. She initiated the "College is in My Future" program for the SAUSD students in conjunction with Santa Ana College and they received a CSBA Golden Bell Award for that. She helped initiate a similar program in the Hacienda-La Puente School District and they also were awarded a CSBA Golden Bell Award. Santa Ana Unified has been one of the ten largest school districts in California for many years, and is predominantly a Latino/a school district; her most recent work statewide has been for the training and implementation of the Common Core State Standards.

Second, her work in the community college segment is truly where her commitment to diversity and equity has shone. From her early work in establishing policies for the EOP&S programs to create access and equity for at-risk students, to creating the Aspire Program (Umoja) for African American students, Audrey has truly demonstrated her commitment to assist all students regardless of race, ethnicity or social economic status. Her service for the past 10 years on the Chief Student Services Officer Board, and the Chair for Region 8 Chief Student Services Officers also demonstrate her commitment, her dedication, and especially her involvement to ensure diversity and access.

Third, her community involvement is legendary. The SAUSD Superintendent clearly stated that if it wasn't for Trustee Noji's commitment to walk the neighborhoods every weekend leading to the bond election, the measure would not have passed! Additionally, she was a founding Board member (1988) and still current Board member of Asian Pacific Americans in Higher Education (APAHE), has been a Board member for Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics (LEAP), and is the founding facilitator of the Leadership Development Program for Higher Education (LDPHE - 1997), which is a leadership program for Asian Pacific Americans. There are currently three community college presidents in the California Community College system that are graduates of that program and beneficiaries of her wisdom and leadership and they are: Frank Chong, Santa Rosa Junior College, Henry Yong, Evergreen Community College, and Lori Adrian, Coastline Community College.



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I believe when you look at the profiles of previous winners of this prestigious award, they are very similar in commitment, involvement, and passion that you find in Audrey. Her lifetime of dedication to assist students from K-12, community college, and even to the graduate students she teaches in a doctorate program is a model of a scholarly practitioner who has lived and breathed the example of access and diversity. She has helped transform a community (Santa Ana) in the 25 years she has served on their school board, and continues to be an on-going encouragement to all students in that District.

It is with the greatest honor and privilege that I strongly support the nomination of **Dr. Audrey Yamagata-Noji** for the John W. Rice Diversity Award, 2014. I know that she would be honored, and would represent the spirit of the award as she has already done for the past 30 years.

Sincerely,

Henry Gee
Vice-President, Student Services
Rio Hondo College