

Otero Junior College 2018 Year in Review

Otero Junior College Continues to Expand and Evolve



Otero Junior College has had a number of changes in 2018 and many things to look forward to in 2019. Long-time OJC President Jim Rizzuto retired in July of 2018. Rizzuto served as President at OJC for 17 and half years.

During Rizzuto's tenure, the college benefited greatly from his leadership. Some of his most notable accomplishments on behalf of the college include being the recipient of several multiple-million dollar grants for STEM, business, healthcare, and various technical training programs. Other notable highlights include leading the college to become a Hispanic serving institution, developing strong partnerships with 4-year universities to increase transfer opportunities for students, and adding several athletic sports that include; men's and women's soccer, men's and women's rodeo, and men's wrestling.

To find a replacement for Rizzuto, the Colorado Community College System (CCCS) conducted a five-month national search. In April Dr. Nancy J. McCallin, former president of the CCCS announced that Dr. Timothy Alvarez would be the fifth president of OJC.

Otero Junior College Welcomes Dr. Alvarez



Dr. Alvarez had been serving as the Senior Fellow for NASPA Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education prior to joining OJC as president. From 2014-2018, he served as Vice President for Student Affairs at North Dakota State University. Prior to his role in North Dakota, Dr. Alvarez spent 15 years in various leadership and teaching roles at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where he also received his Ph.D. in educational leadership.

Dr. Alvarez explained that he truly wants OJC to be the best rural community college in Colorado, and beyond. "I am hoping we will consider cutting edge programs that might allow us to recruit new students and, subsequently, allow us to have a positive impact on our community." Dr. Alvarez stated. "We want La Junta to thrive and believe we should play a positive role in that progress. Further, we continue to explore best

practices that will help us serve some of our most vulnerable students. Regardless of your station in life, you can succeed here and flourish after you leave. In order to accomplish these ambitious goals, we will need to develop intentional fundraising goals and practices, that will help us minimize student debt, while also providing a world class educational experience for all of our students.”



OJC’s students were very busy in 2018. Four students were named to the Phi Theta Kappa All Colorado Academic Team. Andrew Burton, Aurora, Colo., was honored on March 10, 2018, at the Colorado/Wyoming Regional Phi Theta Kappa Convention in Cheyenne, Wyo., as a 2017- 2018 Distinguished Chapter Officer. OJC hosted the Region IX Men’s Baseball Tournament. The OJC men’s basketball team competed in the National Tournament on Feb. 15 – Feb. 18, in Hutchison, Kan. Otero Junior College International student,

Anastasia Zykova attended the Harvard Model of the United Nations (M.U.N) conference in Cambridge, MA. The M.U.N is a chance for students to express their ideas and see what the U.N. discusses at their meetings. The Otero Players presented their Production of Samuel Beckett’s Endgame in April. Mason Mardesich, Gridley, Calif., was named Central Rocky Mountain Region (CRMR) Saddle Bronc Champion for the second year in a row. Head Rodeo Coach Linsay Rosser-Sumpter was named CRMR Coach of the Year. Several sophomore athletes signed with four-year universities. This past fall the OJC Volleyball team was ranked 19th in the nation and competed in the Region IX South Tournament.



OJC continued its partnership with the University of Colorado (CU) Denver to offer a Bachelor’s Degree in Elementary Education. OJC anticipates an expansion to not only offer a Bachelor’s Degree in in Elementary Education, but to also offer secondary education majors in math and science. The first group of students will graduate with a Bachelor’s Degree in Elementary Education this spring. They will be recognized at OJC’s graduation and will also be able to walk at CU Denver’s graduation.

This spring semester OJC has fully launched its new welding program. Ryan Phillips joined OJC to lead the welding program as welding faculty. Fifteen students are currently enrolled in the program this semester. The area previously used for the automotive program underwent renovations for the new program. The program is designed to prepare students to obtain entry-level employment in agriculture, production, and maintenance environments, as well as railroad and pipeline industries. It will allow enrollment of both secondary and post-secondary students.

A music program is currently being developed at OJC. Part-time faculty member Dr. James Lind has joined OJC full-time to begin the process of creating a music program. He will be working to build the program and recruit students for Fall Semester 2019. The program plans to offer classes in music theory, ear training, music history and music appreciation.

Amanda Clerkin joined OJC as Nursing Director and will help OJC offer a Bachelor's of Science (BSN) in Nursing Degree. It is anticipated that OJC will offer a BSN in 2020.

The college also has expanded its offerings of eight week courses. The content of these courses have been normally offered in a 15-week format that has been compressed down to an intense 8-week format.

The section of McDivitt Hall that has been used for the Agriculture Science program is being renovated along with an addition to the building. The college received \$1.3 million from the Colorado State Legislature Capital Development Committee to assist with the project. The project is in the beginning stages. OJC is still working to put a horticulture program in place and will soon begin to advertise for instructors.



Otero Junior College is fully accredited by the Higher Learning Accreditation (HLC) through 2026. After HLC representatives visited OJC in 2016, OJC was required to submit several interim reports. Three interim reports were submitted and approved in the summer of 2018. Two additional reports will be submitted in the summer of 2019.

OJC's Health Navigator Program has expanded to reach more students. The program is now offered as a cooperative program among three southern

Colorado colleges; Otero Junior College, Lamar Community College and Trinidad State Junior College. This new opportunity will allow more students to enroll and complete the program.

Students will take the basic courses through one of the three colleges closest to them, and then finish the degree online through OJC.

The total number of current staff at the college is 201 of which 116 are full-time and 85 are part-time. OJC receives about 55% of its funding from the state of Colorado, with the remainder coming from student tuition and fees.

The OJC Foundation was active over the past year, helping to raise scholarship funds for OJC students. In the 2018-2019 academic year the Foundation will award approximately \$45,000 in scholarships and will provide over \$24,000 in program support. A large number of donations come from individuals in our community. The OJC Foundation could not assist students without the communities' support and dedication.

On May 4, OJC will graduate its 77th class.

