

Students earn academic honor

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Two students from Clackamas Community College were recently chosen to join the 2019 All-Oregon Academic Team. The students, Natalia Rodriguez and Lizajane Gray, made their way to the state Capitol on Friday to meet Governor Kate Brown before transferring locations for an award luncheon with winners from other colleges.

The All-Oregon Academic Team is selected annually, with each of the state's 17 community colleges choosing two students who demonstrate academic excellence as well as service outside the classroom that benefits society. Students apply using a comprehensive online application, and for CCC, the winners are chosen by college president Tim Cook.

"We have a lot of students at Clackamas that are really smart, but what else have they done to be involved and what kind of difference have they made in the community?" Cook said. "I try to look not just at their academics but the type of person they are and the service they're providing as well. Those two out of all the ones that came through

really rose up."

The students were honored at the luncheon, receiving medallions while select students were given the opportunity to speak and share their stories. Gray's hobbies include volunteering for cleanup events, while some of her honors are a John Snively Scholarship Award and CCC Women in Science Scholarship Award. Rodriguez belongs to Canby Reading Mentors and both her and Gray are Phi Theta Kappa members in addition to being on the CCC honor roll.

"It's an amazing honor. I wasn't expecting this level of recognition or the full event. I thought it would just be a small gathering at the school," Gray said.

Both of CCC's winners expressed gratitude, and a bit of surprise, at receiving their awards.

"It's kind of surprising," Rodriguez said. "I've never really won an award. It's a validation of the hard work I've been putting into the college, my community and my school, and that it's not for nothing."

Oregon is just one of 39 states that participates in the national all-state community college academic team program. Here, the award is a collaboration between Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society (PTK) and the Oregon Community College Association. The program is intended to promote our nation's intuitions, quality of instruction and outstanding students, according to PTK's website.

Of course, outstanding students aren't simply born, they're made. Both of CCC's winners spoke about their families being one of the primary drivers of their successes.

"Support from my family and friends. My passion for wanting to do more and give back more — to find out how far I can go," Gray said.

Rodriguez, especially, credits her upbringing.

"My mom is the best person ever. She's so encouraging and real," Rodriguez said before elaborating more on her childhood. "Growing up, our household was bicultural — so my dad is from Mexico. That just taught me how to

work hard and how to be somebody from nothing. It's taught me work hard for what you want and anything is possible."

In addition to being honored, both students received a \$1,000 scholarship to put towards a four-year college or university. Gray intends to pursue a Bachelor of Science in earth science from Portland State University, which she'll use to pursue a career in research focusing on lessening the impact of humans on the environment. Rodriguez, on the other hand, wants to attend Concordia University with the aim of attaining a master's in elementary education and in teaching. Naturally, she intends to put those to use as an elementary school teacher.

"This really reminds us of why we do this work. You hear these stories about students not just from Clackamas but from all over the state that are doing amazing things. Persevering with really difficult lives and difficult challenges, they're able to come and rise above and just be outstanding students and examples of that," Cook said. "It's inspiring."

From left, Board of Education member Irene Konev, Natalia Rodriguez, Lizajane Gray, and Tim Cook pose after the award luncheon in Salem on April 26.



Photo courtesy of Lori Hall