

Giving Back Story

Headline: Supporting the Community During COVID-19



Whittier College is proudly upholding its tradition of community service and support through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thanks to major grants and donations from partners like the BCM Foundation and the Amy Biehl Foundation, the College's Center for Engagement with Communities (CEC) continues to work with educational and public service organizations in Whittier and Los Angeles. This includes activities such as providing meals for the YMCA of Greater Whittier's food program for children and the Whittier's First Day food program for the homeless, and helping to meet needs between organizations with community partners like Love Whittier.

The CEC, as well as the Associated Students of Whittier College (ASWC) Senate, have made significant efforts to help protect the community from COVID-19. The CEC has purchased Personal Protective Equipment for healthcare workers on the frontlines of the pandemic at PIH Health and other hospitals, and ASWC Senate has donated more than 2,000 face masks to the Whittier College campus, LAC+USC Hospital, Carbon Health Clinic in Pasadena, and St. Mathias Church in Uptown Whittier.

"When selecting organizations to donate masks to, we wanted to be sure to select organizations who are providing essential services to vulnerable populations," said ASWC Senate President Destinee Moya '20. "St. Mathias continues to provide meals and resources for our unhoused neighbors and LAC+USC Hospital and Carbon Health Clinic are meeting the needs of low income and non-insured residents in our greater community."

The CEC also continues to serve the needs of young people and families, including those from underserved communities, through its CORE, COMPASS, Artemis, and Amy Biehl Foundation mentoring programs. Traditionally, participants in these programs are

first generation, college-bound students representing five local high schools and three local middle schools. In response to COVID-19, the CEC has made its programs available online to all Whittier-area students, grades 8-12. Students are now able to attend virtual workshops led by Whittier College undergraduates on financial literacy, transitioning from high school to college, and more, as well as meet with college admissions counselors remotely.

“Our Whittier College mentors interact with the students via Google Classroom and Zoom almost weekly,” said Gina DiPierro, interim director of the CEC. “This time period has made us begin to think about how we can continue to use technology in the future to serve more students.”

One of the program’s mentors is Victoria Navarro ’21, a business administration major concentrating in management. Navarro works at the CEC as part of the College’s POET Internship program, which gives current students the opportunity to learn career-related professional skills while working for a department on campus.

“I wanted to intern at the [CEC] because of my interest in helping others navigate through the college application process and also to be able to implement ideas and change throughout the program,” Navarro said. “I love the impact that the CEC has on our community and wanted to be part of it.”

As part of the CEC’s CORE mentor program, Navarro prepares first generation high school juniors and seniors to make informed decisions when applying to college. Through experiential workshops centered on topics like writing a personal statement and understanding FAFSA, Navarro and her fellow mentors guide their mentees by answering any questions they have about college. In addition, Navarro helps support the CORE Program Coordinator with curriculum development and other community based projects.

“I enjoy working with the students in our program,” said Navarro. “Being able to help them navigate the college application process and learn about their goals and interests makes everything we do at the CEC worth it.”

In keeping with the CEC’s guiding principles of service-based learning and mutually beneficial growth, Navarro can measure her own personal and professional development over the course of her internship. While she once had difficulty with public speaking, Navarro’s work with her students has helped her overcome her fears.

Navarro also has a renewed sense of the importance of her and the CEC's mission to foster a strong, supportive community through reciprocity. "During this unfamiliar period, giving back in any way, shape, or form is a blessing. We are all in this together and if everyone pitches in a tiny bit, it can make a big difference."