



Contacts for more information:

Butch Batchelder, Student Employment Advisor
719-549-3046, Butch.Batchelder@pueblocc.edu

Gary Franchi, Public Relations Coordinator
(719) 549-3053, Gary.Franchi@pueblocc.edu

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PCC students will sign pledge Thursday to complete their college education

PUEBLO – Statistics show that the surest way to land a job in a chosen field is for a student to finish college by earning a certificate or degree. This week, students at Pueblo Community College will be making the pledge to do just that.

On Thursday, Feb. 10, PCC's Alpha Rho Theta chapter of Phi Theta Kappa will conduct a Community College Completion Challenge on the Pueblo campus by asking students to sign a form pledging to complete their studies here. The official signing will take place from noon to 2 p.m. in the college's Fortino Ballroom, but PTK members will canvass the campus' buildings throughout the entire afternoon to solicit pledge signatures.

The noon event will somewhat take the form of a rally, with remarks from PCC President Patty Erjavec and a keynote address by PCC history instructor Michael Engle, who is a community college graduate (Otero) and the college's reigning Faculty of the Year recipient. It will include refreshments.

“We really want to draw attention to the fact that our country has gone from number 1 to number 10 in the world over the past 10 years in terms of college graduates,” said Butch Batchelder, PCC's Student Employment Advisor who also serves as the advisor for the college's Phi Theta Kappa chapter.

The “Challenge” at PCC is part of a national movement that Phi Theta Kappa is adopting in response to a call by President Barack Obama for community colleges across the country to produce an additional five million degrees and certificates over the next 10 years. His ultimate goal is to restore the United States as the world's leader in producing college graduates by creating an awareness of the value of completing a college education program.

Obama's actions were in response to a White House Summit on Community Colleges that was hosted last October by Jill Biden, wife of Vice President Joe Biden and a community college professor. The summit praised community colleges for serving almost half of the nation's college students and playing a pivotal role in educating the workforce.

National statistics of community college students give an indication why the challenge for students to complete their education is particularly important:

- 54% work to support themselves or their families, and 25% work 35 or more hours per week
- 23% have dependent children
- 60% are enrolled part-time, limiting their financial aid benefits

Having an associate degree or certificate is extremely valuable to workers:

- By the year 2020, it is estimated that 60% of jobs will require a college credential.
- They earn as much as \$8,000 more per year and about \$400,000 more in a lifetime than a high school graduate.
- Unemployment is typically 30% lower than for high school graduates.

The Fortino Ballroom, the site of the “Challenge” event, is on the second floor of the Student Center, which is located at the corner of Orman Avenue and Harrison Street.

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Founded in 1933, Pueblo Community College is a premier teaching institution focused on providing academic and service excellence to help its students acquire the 21st Century skills needed to better their lives. An educational and technological leader, PCC fosters economic development and utilizes strong partnerships in the communities it serves through its Pueblo, Fremont and Southwest campuses.