



OCC Speech, Debate, & Theater Team Win State Championships by Largest Margin in Over a Decade

The Orange Coast College Speech, Debate, and Theater Team won their 18th State Championship defeating every community college in the largest state championship in the nation. The team dominated the California Community College Forensics Association State Championship, held at the Warner Center Marriott, in Woodland Hills, CA, with an impressive 290 points—outscoring the second-place team by more than 100 points. Points are earned through individual performances that contribute to the overall team total.

OCC secured gold medals in 11 different events, achieving what is known as “low-cume” victory in all but one, meaning OCC students were recognized as the best competitor in their events. There were only three events of the 14 available, where OCC didn’t take home a gold medal. Gold medals are awarded to the top 10 percent in each event.

“Our students are finding their voice, healing that voice, and then using that voice to lift themselves to the next level,” said Head Coach Shauhin Davari. “They took it to another level, and to do that in a year where I’m President of the State Organization, and I’m on TV with a national spotlight on me was a profound showing of support that meant the world to me. This victory was a statement: OCC is a force to be reckoned with.”

These remarkable results came from even more remarkable students. One such student, Nataly Arzate, nearly quit the team earlier this year to help her family. However, after her mother overcame serious health concerns, Nataly returned to the team

revitalized and earned the award for Top Speaker in the state. She was joined by Mia Rinaldi, second-year student from Orange, who previously struggled with public speaking and had severe speaking anxiety until she joined the team. Through incredible hard work, she achieved the top spot in the state alongside her teammate.

Dron Nikam, a first-year exchange student from Nashik, India – a countryside town of around a thousand people – also had a standout performance. Despite English being his fourth language, he brought home a Silver medal in Speech to Entertain, an event similar to stand-up comedy, and a Bronze medal in Impromptu speaking, which requires making a speech up on the spot. “My town is going to go crazy when they see my medals,” said Dron about his success. “I get to give them hope.”



Calendar

APRIL 8

Discover OCC, 4 p.m., College Center Ballrooms

APRIL 9

CLEEO Project 18.0 with Dr. Laura Rendon, 1 p.m., CLEEO Project Center (GEC 109)

Pirate’s Plank, 6:45 p.m., Robert B. Moore Theatre

APRIL 11

Spring Plant Sale, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Horticulture

Coast Colleagues of the Year, 2 p.m., Student Union 101

APRIL 16

Coast Musical Encounters with Saunder Choi, 7:30 p.m., Musical Recital Hall (MUS 102)

APRIL 18

Spring Plant Sale, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Horticulture

APRIL 22 & 23

Spring Friends of the Library Book Sale, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Library Lecture Hall (Room 112)

Piano Honors Recital, 7:30 p.m., Musical Recital Hall (MUS 102)

APRIL 25 & 26

Spring Dance Celebration, 7:30 p.m., Robert B. Moore Theatre

APRIL 28

Memories in Motion: A Vietnamese Refugee Untold Story, 12:15 p.m., Giles T. Brown Forum

APRIL 30

Denim Day, 12:30 p.m., Main Quad

MAY 2

9th Annual Giles T. Brown Student Project and Research Symposium, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., 3rd Floor of College Center

MAY 6

Pop It To Me, 7:30 p.m., Music Recital Hall (MUS 102)

Lily Hall, a first-year student from Santa Ana, made an impressive debut at the state championship after just 3 months on the team. She accomplished a feat none of the other 236 competitors could match: winning gold in three completely different event types – Limited Preparation, Platform Speaking, and Oral Interpretation. A truce ace of all trades, she said, “My coaches saw things in me that I didn’t see. That I doubted. I’ll never doubt myself again.”

“This team’s diversity is its greatest strength,” said Coach Chris DeSurra. “We are Black, Middle Eastern, Indigenous, Caucasian, Asian, Latinx. We are gay, lesbian, trans, non-binary. We are home schooled, from the foster care system, incredibly young and surprisingly old. We’ve been incarcerated, impoverished, we are still struggling with food and housing insecurity. We have fought for our country, and are using the GI Bill. We have been taught to use our voices to foster compassion and empathy in others. We are Orange County.”

OCC Culinary Team Wins Western Regional Competition



Orange Coast College culinary arts students won the 2025 American Culinary Federation’s Western Regional Student Team Competition in Las Vegas, Nevada on March 15. By earning the highest point value, OCC’s Hot Food Team will represent the western region in the national championship.

The American Culinary Federation is the largest professional chef’s organization in North America. This year, OCC’s competing five-member team consisted of Nykolas Peppers, Blanca Granados, Josias Rodriguez, Georgia Williams, and Khoa To.

“OCC has a long tradition of success with the student hot food team competitions,” said OCC culinary arts instructor Chef Davina Dunner. “We are so proud and excited for our students, who are continuing a legacy started in 1996.”

For the competition, the Hot Food Team was tasked with creating a four-course menu showcasing regional flavors and ingredients. They worked closely with OCC’s Horticulture Department and Marine Science Department to harvest tilapia and aquaponic lettuces used in their competition dishes. The winning four-course

menu highlighted ingredients such as mezcal brined tilapia, hibiscus tamarind coulis, and roasted game hen. The students had 90 minutes to cook and 20 minutes to serve the four courses to a panel of four judges, all while working within constraints of 6 burners, 1 convection oven, 1 conventional oven, and 4 electrical outlets.

“This accomplishment was truly a collaborative effort,” says Dunner. “The team received support from numerous OCC faculty and staff, including alumni who guided them through the sharp learning curve of a culinary competition.”

The team will travel to Las Vegas in July to compete in the National Student Team Championships, facing off against four other regional teams. The last time the Pirates won the national title was in 2005.

Orange Coast College Selects Dr. Heather Dy as Dean of Math & Sciences



Orange Coast College welcomes Dr. Heather Dy as its new Dean of the Math and Sciences Division. She replaces Dr. Tara Giblin, who now serves as the College’s Vice President of Instruction.

“We are thrilled to welcome Dr. Heather Dy to Orange Coast College,” says OCC President Dr. Angelica Suarez. “Her extensive experience will be invaluable in supporting student success and educational excellence. With her vision and dedication, we are confident that our students will continue to thrive.”

Dr. Dy joins OCC from Long Beach City College, where she served as a professor and held numerous leadership roles, including faculty professional development coordinator, guided pathways coordinator, and department head. During her tenure, she was the 2022 award recipient for Inspiring Women of LBCC.

“I am so excited to have Dr. Dy join the OCC team, her commitment to students in the classroom and her involvement as a faculty in a

variety of leadership roles at Long Beach City College are a great foundation to prepare her to advocate for her faculty, staff and programs in Math and Sciences,” says Vice President of Instruction Dr. Tara Giblin.

Dr. Dy will be at the helm of a robust division at OCC that includes the College’s astronomy, biological sciences, chemistry, environmental science and ecology, geology, horticulture, marine science, mathematics, natural sciences, and physics programs. The Math Center, MESA, and the OCC Planetarium are also under her purview.

“I am honored to join the Math and Science faculty and staff at Orange Coast College,” says Dr. Dy. “I was drawn to OCC because of their state-of-the-art programs and outstanding faculty and staff. I look forward to continuing the student-centered work that OCC is known for.”

Dr. Dy holds a Bachelor of Science in Biology from Loyola Marymount University, a Master of Science in Biology from California State University, Los Angeles, and a doctorate in higher education from Azusa Pacific University.

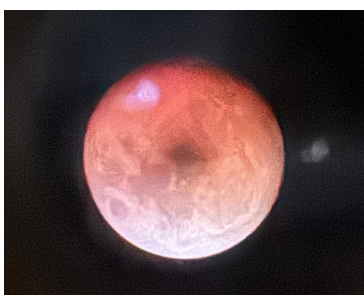
‘Blood Moon’ Lunar Eclipse Brings Midnight Crowd to OCC Planetarium

The Orange Coast College Planetarium welcomed hundreds to campus to experience a total lunar eclipse via the College’s telescopes on March 13.

This lunar eclipse, also known as the “blood moon,” was visible across the United States. The moon will be totally eclipsed for 67 minutes, according to the Farmer’s Almanac.

During the OCC Planetarium’s viewing event, telescopes were available at the Planetarium’s Telescope Farm, allowing guests to get an up-close view of the Moon as it passes through Earth’s shadow, transforming into a deep red during totality.

Throughout the night,



knowledgeable faculty, staff and students from OCC’s astronomy department were available to answer questions and provide insights about this celestial event.

Two special shows were presented inside the Mary Lynn Bergman-Rallis Dome Theater prior to totality.

Three OCC Honors Students Named Semifinalists for Prestigious National Scholarship

Three students from Orange Coast College have been selected as semifinalists for the prestigious Jack Kent Cooke Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship.

OCC students who were named as semifinalists are Christopher Duong, Shahriya Xikeliya, and Ennyo Yasugi. Duong is in the pre-law honor society, Omega Psi Sigma, and Xikeliya and Yasugi are both Phi Theta Kappa honor society members. The OCC students are three out of 120 California nominees and 467 national students selected as semifinalists for the 2025 Jack Kent Cooke Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship. In 2024, five OCC students were chosen as semifinalists, and one OCC student won the national Jack Kent Cooke Scholarship.

“We are extremely proud of our student scholars’ academic achievement,” says OCC President Angelica Suarez. “OCC has a proven record of being a transfer leader, and we are excited to learn about their future transfer plans.”

The Cooke Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship is a prestigious national award that supports high-achieving community college students as they transfer to top four-year institutions to complete their bachelor’s degrees. Semifinalists are chosen from a pool of nearly 1,600 applications attending 212 community colleges in 43 states.

The finalists for the Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship will be announced in May. Each selected scholar will receive financial support for up to three years, college planning services, ongoing advising, and the opportunity to connect with a community of fellow Cooke Scholars.



OCC President Suarez Recognized at OC Board of Supervisors' Meeting



OCC President Suarez was honored by Orange County Supervisor Katrina Foley and the OC Board of Supervisors in recognition of Women's History Month on Tuesday, March 25.

Dr. Suarez was recognized for her outstanding leadership and lasting contributions to education.

7th Annual OCC Pirate's Plank to Showcase Student Entrepreneurship



Orange Coast College's Pirate's Plank will showcase student entrepreneurship on Wednesday, April 9, at 6:45 p.m. in the Robert B. Moore Theatre.

Pirate's Plank is a business pitch competition that encourages OCC students to solve problems and inspires their entrepreneurial spirit. Like ABC's Shark Tank show, OCC students will present their business ideas to a panel of judges, who are three local business leaders and owners. This year's judges include Daniel Gibson, partner at Kobbe Martens IP + Technology Law Firm, Amanda Hazzah, owner of Clutch Motorcycle Training, Inc. and co-founder of The Women's Moto Project, and finally, Mima Ranson, founding chair of ASU FIDM Museum.

The student presenters will pitch their business idea to the panel of judges, who will listen to the presentation and ask questions regarding the product's viability in the marketplace. The judges

will also offer advice to improve their solutions and presentations. This year's presenters include OCC students Aaron Spann, Gearld Canaday IV (Volume LWH), Abner Molina (Talyko), Matthew Mancini (Amplink), and Sotaro Ichii/Jie Kashiwagi (CleanGuard Solutions).

"Pirate's Plank is a platform for students to explore their innovative side and business acumen, along with honing their skills for real-world success," says business associate professor Mark Grooms.

After the five presentations, the judges will select two winners: "Most Likely to Succeed" and "Most Innovative." Each winner will receive a cash prize of \$700. The event is open to the public, and admission is free.

"With Pirate's Plank, OCC is championing the next generation of leaders, entrepreneurs, and problem-solvers," says Grooms.

Plant Enthusiasts & Gardeners Invited to OCC Horticulture's Annual Spring Plant Sale

Orange Coast College's Horticulture Department will host its annual Spring Plant Sale on April 11 and 18 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Plant enthusiasts and gardeners are invited to visit the Horticulture area's garden nursery to purchase plants produced by students of the Horticulture program.

"It's full circle for the students," Horticulture Instructor and Lab Coordinator Joe Stead said. "They get ownership of the plants and see the seed out to the customer."

Local vendors donate plants to the program. Students propagate and tend to them until they are big enough to take home and sell to the community. The stellar selection includes edible plants such as tomatoes, peppers, strawberries, and cooking herbs, as well as other household greens and flowering selections that will be available at the sale.

"We're excited to showcase the high-quality plants our community knows us for," Horticulture Instructor Lori Pullman said. "We will be offering a wide variety of plants for shoppers and will be on hand to answer any customer questions and to offer advice."

The event is free to the public. All proceeds will go toward student scholarships and projects.

