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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Santa Ana College Holds 96th Annual Commencement

(Santa Ana)—Santa Ana College (SAC) will hold its 96th annual commencement exercise on Thursday, May 17, at 6:30 p.m. at Eddie West Field - Santa Ana Stadium, 602 N Flower St, Santa Ana, CA. There are 1,980 students who are eligible to graduate.

The Class of 2012 valedictorian is Ivan de Jesus Garcia, a 28-year-old resident of Moreno Valley. He graduates with an associate of arts degree in speech language pathology assisting with a grade point average of 4.0. Garcia attended Valley View High School in Moreno Valley where he participated in the school's Allied Health Academy. At age 17, he obtained a certified nurse assistant license and began working at a skilled nursing facility. After working in this field for six months, he transitioned to the rehabilitation department. This exposure encouraged him to enter the medical field.

After high school graduation, he attended Riverside Community College and transferred to the University of California, Riverside, where he majored in biological sciences with a minor in Italian. While studying abroad at the UC Study Center in Siena, Italy, he realized that he no longer wanted to become a physician, but still liked the healthcare field and the study of language. After taking two years off from his studies, he discovered the field of speech pathology, which melded his love for language and for healthcare.

In 2010, he entered the SAC Speech Language Pathology Assistant Program commuting 100 miles every day to and from the college to his home in Moreno Valley. At the same time, he continued his full-time job at Reche Canyon Rehabilitation and Health Care Center, successfully completed internships at the Jurupa Unified School District and the St. Jude Centers for Rehabilitation and Wellness. His long-term goal is to obtain a master's degree in communicative disorders. He hopes to provide services to the underrepresented language communities for whom resources and services are limited and one day establish his own practice.

“Santa Ana College has provided me with the opportunity to pursue something I have a passion for,” said Garcia. “I was able to focus on the types of patients I would like to work with and Program Coordinator Monica Porter helped me get good internships offering a wide range of experiences.”

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More than 5,000 people, including 600 graduates, friends and families, are expected to attend the commencement ceremony this Thursday. Among the graduates will be 31 Middle College High School graduates who will receive both their high school diplomas and associate degrees this spring paving their way to transfer to universities.

“Commencement is a very special occasion for our students, their families, our faculty and staff,” said Erlinda J. Martinez, Ed.D., Santa Ana College president. “Our students have had to overcome numerous obstacles—balancing family responsibilities and economic challenges while completing degree and certificate requirements. Our commencement exercise honors their dedication and hard work.”

This year’s faculty speaker is Suzanne Freeman, SAC professor of fire technology. Freeman’s career with Costa Mesa Fire Department began in 1987. Her positions included fire protection specialist, fire education specialist, and public information officer. She came to SAC in 1992 and now teaches a wide range of entry-level fire technology courses and serves as advisor the Fire Technology Club. In addition, she has been active on both state and national curriculum committees helping to standardize instruction across the state and nation. As a self-proclaimed “fire prevention geek,” she publishes a blog, www.firepreventiongeek.blogspot.com and tweets about fire prevention via www.twitter.com/FirePrevGeek.

Other individuals to be honored at the SAC ceremony include:

- Lynn Marecek, SAC professor of mathematics, will be recognized for receiving the Distinguished Faculty Award. In her 17 years at SAC, Marecek has made countless contributions to curriculum and development for the Mathematics Department. Her pioneering efforts in the development and coordination of the Freshman Experience Program earned the California Community College Board of Governors Exemplary Program Award this year. In 2011, she and fellow mathematics professor, MaryAnn Anthony-Smith co-authored *Strategies for Success*.
- Ruth Rodriguez, SAC senior interpreter, will be honored as the Classified Employee of the Year. A SAC alumna, she has been employed by the college for 22 years as part of the Disabled Student Programs and Services. She works closely with the students in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program offering interpretation services on a total of five school campuses. She will also provide sign language interpretation services at this year’s commencement.

About Santa Ana College

Part of Rancho Santiago Community College District, Santa Ana College serves nearly 35,000 credit and non-credit students each semester and offers 136 certificate and associate degree programs. This mission of the Rancho Santiago Community College District (RSCCD) is to respond to the educational needs of an ever-changing community and to provide programs and services that reflect academic excellence. Santa Ana College and Santiago Canyon College are public community colleges of RSCCD, which serves the residents of Anaheim Hills, East Garden Grove, Irvine, Orange, Santa Ana, Tustin and Villa Park. Both colleges provide education for academic transfer and careers, courses for personal and professional development, customized training for business and industry, and programs to train nurses, firefighters and law enforcement personnel.

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