

First Group of Genomics Scholars Celebrated

In late May, Pauline Stahl, Ed.D., a science teacher at Encinal Jr. & Sr. High School, hosted a special event for juniors and seniors at her school: a Genomics Honors Celebration.

The event was designed to celebrate the academic accomplishments of the EHS juniors and seniors who successfully completed the genomics dual enrollment courses offered through Merritt College. Proud parents and grandparents joined Superintendent McPhetridge, Merritt College instructors Bob Macey, Ph.D. and Karen Wedaman, and Career Technical Education Specialist Felicia Vargas for a dinner at AUSD's district office.

Following the dinner, the juniors gave a scientific poster presentation entitled, "Using the Power of Lizard DNA, Genomics, and Bioinformatics to Test Hypotheses Related to the Biogeography of the Iranian Plateau." The seniors then gave a presentation illustrating the impact that genomics is having at the leading-edge of cancer research.

The 19 seniors are the first cohort of graduates to complete the 2-year genomics program of study that Dr. Stahl established with Dr. Macey at Merritt College. They graduated with more than 18 college credits in genomics and anthropology and by all accounts found the program both engaging and valuable.

"The Genomics program offers a plethora of opportunity inside and outside of the classroom," said senior Emily Chau, who is now off to UC Berkeley. "Inside, I was exposed to the interdisciplinary reality of the sciences. In addition, the Genomics class allowed me to gain valuable laboratory skills, such as pipetting, running gel electrophoresis, and PCR.

"Outside the classroom, this class sets up students like me for success to pursue lab work with professors in college as well as possible careers in medicine, health, education, or research. I figured out that I want to become a professor in addition to doing research on questions that puzzle me. I would have never been able to find my passion without this program."

At the conclusion of the celebration, Dr. Stahl presented each of the graduates with a certificate of completion and a yellow honor cord signifying scientific achievement and encouraged seniors to wear the cord with their cap and gown at the EJSHS graduation. "I

cannot tell you how proud I am of these students and all they have learned,” she says. “What an amazing thing for EHS students to be able to participate in.”

The next cohort of EJSHS students to study genomics has already been recruited. In addition, Vargas is working to establish a new biotech CTE pathway at Alameda High School that will be launched in 2019-20.

“I am so thrilled to see Dr. Stahl, her students, and our partners in the Peralta Community College District bringing college credit opportunities to Encinal Junior & Senior High School in this dual enrollment program. We are lucky to see this innovative program in place there.