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CRAFTON HILLS COLLEGE

BOARD OF TRUSTEES REPORT

The ASL Course That Became a Calling

Amanda Sharples returned to college three years ago after a significant life transition, enrolling full time at Crafton Hills College to pursue a nursing degree. As she approached her final semester of prerequisite courses, she chose ASL over other spoken language course offerings. What she didn't see coming was the December evening when those newly learned skills would become a lifeline for a stranger.

"At the time, it felt like just another requirement — interesting, but not something I imagined would play a meaningful role in my life beyond the classroom," she said.

The night after taking her final ASL exam, Sharples and her boyfriend, Craig Henderson, went for a walk near their neighborhood. They came across a man sitting alone on the darkened patio of a recently closed restaurant. When Henderson waved said "hello," the man didn't respond verbally.

"Amanda, I think he's deaf. Can you communicate with him?" asked Henderson.

Despite feeling uncertain about her skills, Sharples realized this was exactly why she had taken the class. She stepped forward and signed to the man, asking if he was deaf. "His eyes lit up," she recalled.

The man, David, had not encountered anyone who could communicate with him in American Sign Language in some time. What began as a brief exchange turned into an hour-and-a-half conversation. Sharples learned David had been experiencing homelessness and was eager to find employment, but the communication barriers created by his deafness had made that extremely difficult.

"I can't stop thinking about how easily this moment could have been missed," Sharples said, "if I had let insecurity silence me instead of trying."

That night, Sharples and Henderson gathered David a tent, pillows, a sleeping bag, and a backpack full of food, water, and basic supplies. The following day, they connected David with Set Free Yucaipa, a local church with a Cold Weather Shelter program. Within hours, David had a warm place to sleep, access to showers, and a supportive community around him.

The story didn't stop there. Henderson, a small business owner, offered David a day of paid work doing landscaping. David accepted enthusiastically and now regularly helps on jobs.

"More than the paycheck, you could see how much it meant to him to feel useful, capable, and seen," Sharples said.

For Sharples, the experience reframed her entire academic journey. Returning to school as a nontraditional student after major life upheaval had required what she described as "humility, sacrifice, and a level of courage I didn't always feel I had."

The ASL course gave Sharples both foundational signing skills and a new perspective on the importance of communication access for the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community. "What I thought was just another class became a bridge between isolation and connection, between hopelessness and opportunity," she said.

Photo: Brighton, Sharples, Henderson, David

Crafton Hills College STEM Career & Transfer Fair

The Quad came alive on March 4 as CHC's Career Center and MESA (Math · Engineering · Science Achievement) program welcomed students, university representatives, and industry employers for the third annual STEM Career & Transfer Fair. Running from 10 AM to 1 PM, the event offered students a hands-on opportunity to explore their futures in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

More than 20 universities and employers set up booths across the quad, where students could gather information, ask questions, and make meaningful connections.

As students arrived and checked in, they received an activity sheet designed to encourage meaningful networking. The sheet featured curated questions for both university representatives and employers that prompted conversations about programs, career pathways, internship opportunities, and transfer requirements. To earn a food voucher, students were challenged to visit at least three employer booths and three university booths, completing the questions at each stop.

"The STEM Transfer and Career Fair was a wonderful opportunity for Crafton students to explore their future possibilities," said Lisamarie Jordan of the STEM/MESA Center at Crafton Hills College. "The energy on campus was incredibly positive and the weather was beautiful. The students were actively engaged with recruiters, asking questions, and learning about pathways into STEM careers and transfer institutions. The event was the result of months of collaboration, and it was exciting to see that planning come to life."

Photo: STEM Career & Transfer Fair

Michael Sheahan on the importance of discovering your 'why'

It took Michael Sheahan years to discover his "why."

Sure, the future respiratory therapist (RT) turned Crafton Hills College professor excelled at test taking, but when it came to landing a job in the field, Sheahan was going nowhere. "When I was first starting out, I thought it was just a job," he explains. "But over the years, through the experiences I've had in hospitals and health care, it became so much more."

Today, the program director and faculty co-chair of Crafton's Respiratory Therapy program, speaks directly to his students about the importance of finding their why's both in- and-outside of the classroom. This spring, he's taking his message on the road with speaking engagements scheduled at the California and Missouri societies for respiratory care.

Respiratory therapy itself is a multi-faced job where RTs are trained to make strategic life-saving decisions quickly in both emergency and non-emergency settings. But it's the connections an RT makes with a patient and their loved ones that can be the difference-making in one's day or, in Sheahan's case, a lifetime.

"One night, I was called to an emergency c-section. I went upstairs [at the hospital] and completed my normal to-do list, but I wasn't smart enough to understand what was really going on," he explained. "When the baby was born, it was having issues with its breathing and had to be put on a ventilator. It only lived for eight hours after that, but through this whole experience is really when I realized that this wasn't just a patient—it was a human being."

"It was right then and there that I realized how precious life truly is. These parents would only be able to hold their child for its first and last time, and I was ashamed I hadn't realized the importance of this job before then," Sheahan continued. "To have to watch these parents say "hi" and "bye" to their newborn is what I had been missing, and that 'why' was my reason for choosing this career - helping others on either their worst day or their best."

Photo: Michael Sheahan

Crossing the Finish Line: Grad Fest Prepares the Class of 2026

Grad Fest gave students the clarity and encouragement they needed to prepare for the finish line. Held at the Barbara L. Smith Event Center, the event brought together students nearing completion with counselors, advisors, and campus partners who could help them take those final, decisive steps. Grad Fest was organized by the Crafton Hills College Counseling Department and Student Services Division Students connected with counselors for on-the-spot graduation checks and met with representatives from four-year universities to learn about life after Crafton Hills College.

Students were recognized for their academic progress in a tangible way: milestone pins were available for those who had completed 15, 30, and 45 units. Those ready to gear up for the ceremony could stop by the bookstore table to purchase their caps and gowns, and there was a graduation-themed photo booth where students could dress up in regalia and get photo strips.

Of the approximately 123 students who checked in at the event, over 75% indicated they were graduating this semester. Additionally, during the Spring 2026 graduation application period, a total of 893 Crafton Hills College students applied for graduation.

"Grad Fest is an important moment where we celebrate students' progress while also making sure they have the guidance they need to cross the finish line," said Ivan Peña, Ed.D., Dean of Student Services & Counseling. "It reflects CHC's commitment to supporting students from enrollment all the way to completion."

By combining the celebration with practical, hands-on support, the event helped transform students who are "almost there" into graduates.

Photo: Family at 2026 Grad Fest

From Crafton to Advocacy: Evelyn Olive's Journey to Disability Rights Leadership

When Evelyn Olive enrolled in Psychology Statistics at Crafton Hills College in fall 2022, she simply intended to complete a requirement for the Social Work program at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). She didn't plan to apply that semester because she still had three prerequisite courses and additional classes to finish her associate degree for transfer in sociology at Crafton. But when her professor, Dr. Pfahler, emphasized that grades would be submitted immediately because students were applying to CSUSB's Social Work program, something shifted. That encouragement pushed Evelyn to take a chance on herself.

She applied to both CSUSB and California Baptist University and was accepted to both, ultimately choosing CSUSB. What followed was anything but easy. While navigating serious medical challenges—including a coma and heart attack—and facing the threat of homelessness, Evelyn persisted. At the same time, she became a leader and advocate on campus, serving as treasurer and then president of the National Alliance on Mental Illness on Campus chapter, treasurer of the Social Work Student Association, and a member of Phi Alpha Honor Society. Driven by her experience as a student with disabilities, Evelyn worked to challenge and dismantle barriers that limited access to Education Abroad programs. After advocating for change, she studied abroad in Japan, redefining what is possible for disabled students who want to pursue global learning opportunities.

This May, Evelyn will graduate with her Bachelor of Arts in Social Work and a minor in Disability Studies. Two weeks later, she will begin CSUSB's Advanced Standing Master of Social Work program, focusing on disability rights. Her goal is to consult with universities to expand accessible study abroad opportunities.

Photo: Evelyn Olive

Women's History Month Opening Ceremony & Kickoff Event Recap

Crafton Hills College kicked off Women's History Month on Monday, March 2nd with an exciting Opening Ceremony & Kickoff Event held from 12–2pm in the Barbara L. Smith Event Center.

The event was a hit from the start, with attendees receiving sustainable "swag" including reusable utensils, bento boxes made from recycled plastic, and bookmarks that can be planted and will grow into herbs — a fitting touch for a month themed around sustainability.

The highlight of the afternoon was a captivating presentation by featured speaker Dr. Katy Wimberly, Astrophysicist at CSUSB. Dr. Wimberly shared stunning images of galaxies, insights into how scientists use space to determine age, and a closer look at the amount of debris orbiting our planet. "The event was an overwhelming success," said Andrea Dillon, Microbiology Professor and Women's History Month event committee member. "Dr. Katy Wimberly blew everyone's mind. She captivated students, staff, and faculty. Definitely a great kick off to WHM."

Women's History Month at CHC continued throughout March with a full lineup of events, including an Artist Talk with Ebony Soy (March 10), a Women's Voices of Change & Growth faculty discussion (March 11), Daily Sustainability Challenges during Spring Break (March 16–20), an Artist Talk with Nancy Nieto (March 24), and a Mindful Movement Session (March 25).

Photo: Women's History Month Event

National Astronomy Lecture Series Coming to Crafton Hills College

CHC has been selected as a host site for the American Astronomical Society (AAS) Shapley Visiting Lectures Program, bringing a nationally recognized astronomer to campus in Fall 2026.

Each year, the AAS selects a small group of astronomers to travel to colleges and community institutions across the United States to share their research and engage the public in the wonders of the universe. The program supports a series of lectures for students as well as a public presentation for the local community.

As part of the 2026 cohort, Dr. Katy Rodriguez Wimberly of California State University, San Bernardino will visit Crafton Hills College. She will present her research and spend time connecting with students, educators, and community members.

Photo: Dr. Katy Rodriguez Wimberly

CHC Students Attend Watchorn Lincoln Dinner at University of Redlands

Professor Sabrina Jimenez took seven Crafton students to the Watchorn Lincoln Dinner at the University of Redlands Orton Center. The event was hosted by the Watchorn Lincoln Memorial Association and the Lincoln Memorial Shrine.

The students were chosen because they stood out in class — not just for strong grades, but for active participation and their ability to connect historical events to current issues. Only two were history majors, but all share a serious interest in the subject. The keynote speaker, Leonne Hudson, spoke on "The Reactions of African Americans to the Death of Abraham Lincoln: The Great and Good President."

Drawing from his recent book, Black Americans in Mourning: Reactions to the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln, he examined how Black communities responded to Lincoln's assassination and how their voices shaped the historical record. All seven students purchased the book after the event, continuing the learning beyond the classroom.

Photo: Watchorn Lincoln Dinner