

Unions work with college district to develop labor-themed curriculum

"We're taught about the Carnegies and the Fords and the Mellons, and all those millionaires, but not what working people do," said Dolores Huerta who unionized farmworkers with Cesar Chavez in the 1960s.

By Paul Clinton □ Staff Writer

To better tell the history of working people, labor unions are collaborating with the Los Angeles Community College District to develop general education classes that incorporate labor-related themes.

About five such classes would be in place at Harbor College in Wilmington in the fall, with another five to follow in the spring. The curriculum, which is under the banner of the Dolores Huerta Institute, is named after an iconic labor leader who, with Cesar Chavez, unionized farmworkers in the 1960s.

The program was unveiled last week at the Wilmington campus and East Los Angeles College.

"We're taught about the Carnegies and the Fords and the Mellons, and all those millionaires, but not what working people do," Huerta, 76, said during her visit to Wilmington on Wednesday.

At Harbor College, courses would be offered through the Program for Accelerated College

Education. The program is oriented toward working adults seeking a bachelor's degree. Course content will be set up so that one class could satisfy two general education requirements.

A typical semester runs 16 weeks.

The courses -- to be offered at all nine community colleges -- will include labor themes but not exclusively focus on them, Harbor College President Linda Spink said.

"The faculty is just developing the curriculum now," Spink said. "We're not going to have every course be on the labor movement."

In addition to the classes, labor unions will provide speakers to the community colleges. Local chapters of the Service Employees International Union and International Longshore and Warehouse Union have promised funding to set up fellowships to allow faculty members to take up to two weeks of paid leave to develop classes.

Planners said the program is ideally suited to Harbor College, which is in a community with deep labor roots given its proximity to the Port of Los Angeles and the thousands of union workers employed there.

"It's a perfect fit for the Harbor (Area), because there's a very strong union presence," said John Delloro, executive director of the institute.

"And the students are working people. Most working people don't know their history and

rights."

Who is Dolores Huerta?

In 1962, the then 31-year-old labor activist and Cesar Chavez founded a union that eventually became the United Farm Workers, to represent grape pickers. She directed a national grape boycott that eventually led to a contract with growers.

On the Web:

Watch Dolores Huerta speak at Los Angeles Harbor College about the labor curriculum that will bear her name.

(www.youtube.com/watch?v=dLoT0KD87Nc)

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