



MEDIA RELEASE

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CONTACT: Raechel Dawson: rdawson@highline.edu

Highline College to Celebrate 60 Years in Higher Education 2021-22 Academic Year Launches 60th Anniversary Festivities

DES MOINES, Wash. — From its humble beginnings at a high school campus in 1961 to an expanding presence in the community on top of an 80-acre college campus in 2021, Highline College has seen its fair share of change in the last 60 years.

Its first 385 students have now grown to more than 350,000 alumni. Highline, its students, and its alumni added \$600-million-plus in income to the King County economy during fiscal year 2014-15, the most recent year studied.

And the college has undergone a transformation in almost every aspect. The educational programs and careers students pursue have evolved in addition to the types of degrees Highline offers, which include more than 120 different certificates, associate and Bachelor of Applied Science degrees. Then, of course, there's the advanced technology the college has adapted to meet students where they're at in their educational goals, both online and in person.

To celebrate this 60-year transformation, Highline College will kick off its 60th anniversary with a series of events throughout the upcoming 2021-22 academic year, which begins this September. More information about those events will be available at [highline.edu](https://www.highline.edu).

“A lot has changed since the 1960s, including Highline College,” said **Dr. John Mosby, president of Highline College**. “But as we celebrate today and look to the future, I know one part of Highline will never change, and that's its commitment to serving our incredible students.”

While that commitment has been steadfast and will continue to hold true in the future, the college's changing student demographic is actually what has helped form Highline College into what it is today — the most diverse college in Washington state with a strong commitment to social justice.

Dating back to its beginnings, founding faculty were instrumental in leading the college's pathway toward its foundational values. In the 1990s, those values became a tangible plan, which

included an initiative that the college would create a climate that values diversity and enhances global perspectives.

Highline's equity and diversity awards in recent years only scratch the surface in recognizing the work that's been done behind the scenes and continues to be worked on. From its upcoming Equity First strategic planning to daily classroom teachings, diversity, equity and inclusion continue to be at the core of what makes Highline Highline.

Looking forward, Highline College will celebrate its expansion into the City of Federal Way with the opening of The Hub: Federal Way Higher Education Center, located at 1615 S. 325th St., in September, and welcomes the positive changes that will come with the construction of Sound Transit's Federal Way Link Extension, which will be open for service in 2024. The light rail project will increase access to Highline's campus by adding an affordable transportation option via link light rail for students living as far north as Seattle and as far south as The Hub's location in Federal Way. It will also increase educational opportunities by providing direct access to the University of Washington for Highline graduates who live in the South King County region.

Timeline

- **1959:** A Highline School District citizens' committee began studying the need for a local junior college. The committee and district set out to prove the area's need by establishing an extended secondary program — the first step toward a two-year college — by offering post-high school classes at Highline High School.
- **1961:** Highline College became the first community college in King County and welcomed 385 students to portable classrooms at Glacier High School, a temporary location until the college's campus opened in 1964.
- **1962:** Dr. Melvin "Pat" Allan became Highline's first permanent president.
- **1964:** Highline moved to its present location at South 240th Street and Pacific Highway South, a tree-filled 80-acre hillside overlooking Puget Sound and the Olympic Mountains.
- **1976:** Dr. Shirley B. Gordon, who would later have a Des Moines park named in her honor, became Highline's third permanent president, making her the first female to lead the college and, at the time, the only female president of a publicly-funded college in the state. Dr. Gordon was one of Highline's first three founding faculty members and instrumental in the college's establishment.
- **1984:** Des Moines annexed land south of its original city limits, an area known as Midway, including the Highline College campus.
- **1990:** Seattle Mayor Norm Rice was named the first recipient of Highline's Distinguished Alumnus Award.

- **1998:** Highline’s student population reached 34% students of color, which would begin the upward trend to its present-day status as the most diverse higher education institution in the state, mirroring the growing diversity of South King County.
- **2003:** The MaST Center officially opened as a learning center on Redondo Beach Drive, building on its prior use as a facility for research and a biology lab from the 1990s to 2003. It was also the site of Highline’s Undersea Diving Program from the 1960s to the 1990s.
- **2014:** Highline College received its first Award of Excellence from the American Association of Community Colleges for increasing diversity and social equity on campus.
- **2015:** Highline began offering bachelor’s degrees in four applied fields: Cybersecurity and Forensics, Global Trade and Logistics, Respiratory Care, and Youth Development. Three more would be added in the coming years, making it easier for working adults to find education in Des Moines.
- **2016:** Highline graduated one of its largest classes at 2,300 students, adding to the more than 350,000 who have attended Highline.
- **2016:** A study released in December 2016 quantified Highline’s economic impact on the region and area residents. Among other findings, the study concluded that for every \$1 of public money invested in Highline, taxpayers receive a cumulative value of \$4.70 over the course of the students’ working lives, for an average annual rate of return of 15.6%.
- **2018:** Dr. John R. Mosby became the first Highline president of color.
- **2019:** Campus View student housing became available through a public-private partnership supported by the City of Des Moines.
- **2020:** The state-of-the-art Health and Life Sciences Building opened on campus after a major renovation to the original 1975 structure. It is the college’s first LEED-certified building and will help educate students seeking health care careers.
- **2020:** Highline College successfully pivoted to remote learning in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic
- **2021:** Highline College will launch its Equity First strategic planning in addition to opening The Hub: Federal Way Higher Education Center in September 2021.

Quotes

"Congratulations to Highline College for 60 years of growth and innovation in education. You are an asset to Des Moines and the greater community in which you serve. We are proud that you are part of our City and look forward to your continued presence, as well as our continued partnerships into the future." — **Matt Pina, Mayor of Des Moines and Councilmember**

“As the most diverse college in the state, Highline College embodies what community and technical colleges stand for, equity and opportunity for all Washingtonians. Congratulations on 60 years of service to South King County,

looking forward to more great accomplishments over the next 60 years.” — **Jan Yoshiwara, Executive Director, Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges**

“Ever since being founded as the first community college in King County 60 years ago, Highline College has enriched our community and our state. I was honored to serve as a Highline College trustee some time ago and it was my favorite job ever! Over many years, I have seen the faculty, staff and students of Highline live out the values of this learning community: diversity, innovation, excellence and service to others. Here’s to another 60 years!” — **Karen Keiser, State Senator, 33rd District**

“Big congratulations to Highline College for 60 years of teaching our community and community members. Highline has a stellar track record in being one of the nation’s leaders in providing an inclusive and impactful education experience to people from all backgrounds and walks of life – this includes the amazing people who work at Highline and make it what it is today. The college has touched three generations of my family: my mother, me and my daughter. Thank you for being the higher and brighter learning community we are lucky to experience.” — **Mia Gregerson, State Representative, 33rd District**

“Numerous things make me so very proud of Highline College: it welcomes and celebrates diversity, it pushes for innovation with partnerships to really meet the needs of our community and it has one of the largest Running Start programs in the state. In fact, my son went to Running Start at Highline College and it was a great experience for him. All of these things make it a remarkable institution of higher learning, but what I am most proud of is how its staff and faculty make Highline a safe and supportive place, how they understand that students are more than classwork. Congratulations for the first six decades of providing a top-notch education and serving our community with excellence. Here’s to many, many more years to come!” — **Tina Orwall, State Representative, 33rd District**

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**Attachment:
Links within this release:**

Founded in 1961 as the first community college in King County, Highline College annually serves more than 16,500 students. With over 70 percent students of color, Highline is the most diverse higher education institution in the state. The college offers a wide range of academic transfer, professional-technical education, basic skills and applied bachelor’s degree programs.

Alumni include former Seattle Mayor Norm Rice, entrepreneur Junki Yoshida and former Washington state poet laureate Sam Green.