



MEDIA RELEASE

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Saovra Ear Named Interim Vice President at Highline College Refugee Knows Challenges of College for First-Generation Students of Color

DES MOINES, Wash. — A Cambodian refugee whose American college experience shaped his life and career has been named interim vice president at Highline College. Dr. Saovra “Sy” Ear will oversee the college’s Student Services division beginning Nov. 26.

“The experience of my family as refugees instilled the value of education as a way to move into the middle class,” said Ear, who grew up in a low-income household of seven.

But the college experience itself was a challenge, especially for someone whose parents didn’t attend college and couldn’t offer advice. College life can be complex. His struggles stuck with him, leading him to a career helping all students succeed in college.

“My experience as a student and professional shaped who I am today as an educational leader,” he said.

In leading the Student Services division, Ear will oversee a variety of services and programs to promote student access, retention and completion.

Highline President John Mosby highlighted Ear’s passion and commitment to the community college mission of transforming lives and communities.

“He values inclusive excellence and collaboration in his efforts to create opportunities for all students to succeed,” Mosby said in a message to Highline’s campus community.

Mosby noted that Ear has developed and implemented effective organizational processes and innovative programs during nearly two decades serving students in Washington’s community colleges. His efforts have increased student enrollment and completion while advancing equity and social justice.

“I am a strong believer in the mission of community colleges to increase and promote equitable student success,” Ear said.

Ear traces his passion for equity and social justice from his lived experience as a refugee, first-generation student and student of color.

His journey to the United States began when he was 2 years old, when he and his family left Cambodia. They spent three years in a refugee camp in Thailand before arriving in the U.S. when he was 5. After a stint on the East Coast, the family settled in South King County, where they've spent the past 31 years.

A 15-year resident of Kent, Ear believes his connection to the South King County community will be an advantage in his new role.

“A lot of time, especially in this case, the college is the heart and soul of the community,” he said. “I am extremely proud to have the opportunity to go to Highline in a leadership role. I look forward to serving my community.”

At Highline, he looks forward to serving the college's diverse student population where more than 70 percent are students of color, making it the most diverse higher education institution in the state.

Currently, he oversees the Enrollment and Entry Services areas at Edmonds Community College. He also served as interim vice president for Edmonds' Student Services division.

In addition to his work at Edmonds, Ear spent time at Green River College and at South Seattle College in a number of areas, including advising, ELL transition services and financial aid.

He earned his doctorate in educational leadership from the University of Washington Tacoma and his master's degree in student development administration from Seattle University. He is a graduate of the 2017 Washington Executive Leadership Academy (WELA) and also completed the Leadership Development Program for Higher Education (LDPHE), sponsored by Leadership Education for Asians Pacific (LEAP) out of California.

Ear's interim appointment will end Dec. 31, 2019. In the spring of 2019, the college will begin the search for a permanent replacement for Toni Castro, who left the position in September 2018.

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Attachment: Photo of Dr. Saovra “Sy” Ear

Founded in 1961 as the first community college in King County, Highline College annually serves more than 17,000 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.