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RAMAPO COLLEGE PREPARES UNDERGRADUATE SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS FOR CASEWORKER POSITIONS IN PUBLIC CHILD WELFARE

(Mahwah) – Ramapo College of New Jersey is one of seven higher education institutions in the state to participate in the Baccalaureate Child Welfare Education Program (BCWEP) that prepares undergraduate social work students for careers in public child welfare.

The intent of the program is to enhance the public child welfare workforce by encouraging students with generalist social work education and additional coursework in child welfare to enter professional positions in New Jersey public child welfare agencies. It is believed if social work students are given the financial resources and the opportunity for a fieldwork experience, child welfare agencies such as DYFS will benefit. The program will also provide a better-trained workforce.

Three Ramapo College students majoring in social work are participating in the BCWEP, including Helen Ha of Paramus and Lori Lavery of East Rutherford. They were in field placements during the fall 2005 semester and will continue during the spring. They will work in the offices of the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) in Bergen County. The students will receive tuition, fees and a stipend of \$5,500 for one academic year and serve a 400-hour internship at an office of DYFS. In return, students accepting a traineeship must sign a legally binding commitment to work for DYFS for a minimum of one year following graduation.

“This is a win-win situation,” notes Dr. Susan Scher, an associate professor of social work who oversees the BCWEP at Ramapo College. “It helps students by providing financial assistance, helps them test out if this is the field of practice for them

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and offers them a job as they leave college. DYFS wins because they will have a pool of entry level staff who know what it means to work in a public child welfare setting. The program strengthens Ramapo College's commitment to the community.”

BCWEP is a collaborative effort by the New Jersey Office of Children's Services and a consortium of seven accredited baccalaureate social work programs in New Jersey. The lead institution in the consortium is Richard Stockton College of NJ. In addition to Ramapo College, other member institutions include Georgian Court University, Kean University, Monmouth University, Rutgers University-Newark and Seton Hall University. It is an outgrowth of the New Jersey Baccalaureate Social Work Education Association, which has long addressed issues affecting social work education at the undergraduate level. Federal funds available under Title IV-E of the Social Security Act and a state match support the program.

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