

EMPLOYMENT

Both colleges pioneer solutions to workforce development

Partnerships with local businesses open doors

By Nicole Gregory
contributing writer

Administrators in the South Orange County Community College District are continually identifying and developing new career education programs that will put their students in the best possible position for employment. And they do this through ongoing partnerships with local businesses.

Whether the programs focus on emerging technology such as AI or more traditional programs such as business administration, they are each developed with careful analysis and must meet criteria, such as directly leading to jobs with a living wage, administrators say.

“We scan where our strengths are in our region and determine programs that align with existing areas of focus,” said Tram Vo-Kumamoto, vice president of instruction at Saddleback College. “We go through a process of looking at the labor market in the area, as well as programming in other community colleges, and we identify gaps.”

Local businesses’ leaders play a key role in this process. Each program has an advisory board of people who are working in these businesses, said Rick Miranda, vice president of instruction at Irvine Valley College. “This advisory board tells us what skills are needed in the field because they’re the ones who are out there. Then we respond and adapt our programs to make sure we are successful in creating the needs to meet the industry.”

Miranda explained that at Irvine Valley College this often means giving students direct experience in developing skills and offered a few examples. “We have design model making and rapid prototyping — these are hands-on programs that are using state-of-the-art technology. Digital media arts uses the most recent computer-aided graphics. We’re building these visualization tools



Irvine Valley College hosts a fall Job Fair on Oct. 22.

PHOTO BY DREW A. KELLEY, CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

for the world out there.”

Saddleback College also relies on guidance from advisory boards to help create programs in evolving areas. “They provide us with insight about what’s new and latest workforce needs,” Vo-Kumamoto said. “They review our curriculum, and we make adjustments based on their feedback,” she said.

Saddleback’s nursing program is ranked first in the nation in pass rates of the National Council Licensure Examination, the exam for licensing registered nurses across the country,

according to the National Council of State Boards of Nursing, which administers the exam. In addition to training nurses for Orange County’s growing number of hospitals, classes for acute care nursing assistant, administrative medical assistant, certified nursing assistant and emergency medical technician are being developed to meet needs of local health care settings, Vo-Kumamoto said.

Partnerships with local business also open new opportunities for students. “As part of our business administration and management program, which is a strong one, we host what we call an idea pitch competition at least once a year where our students pitch to local business organizations,” Miranda said. Business leaders listen to students present a business pitch and then offer feedback, helping students define their ideas so they can then go forward, he said.

Such partnerships are created with a coordinated effort, Miranda said. “We have a career development office to help students. We have a dean that oversees career ed. We also have a director who is going out to local business groups and making these connections,” he said. “We are building up the support for our faculty, and our students to have multiple access points to future careers.”

At Saddleback College, one partnership recently enabled 40 Saddleback students in the School of Business and Industry to attend a leadership workshop through Imagination Campus at the Disneyland Resort.

Sometimes a business requests a community college program to train individuals for a specific workforce gap. That was how Saddleback College partnered with the Orange County Transit Authority when it was approached to create a program to train new bus drivers, to address the current shortage of drivers.

“The OCTA worked with us and with support of the Orange County Community Foundation,” Vo-Kumamoto said. So far, that program has trained 92 graduates, and the Orange County Transit Authority has hired 38 of them, she said.

Programs such as accounting are also broken down into specific areas that address professional needs, Miranda said. For example, Irvine Valley College provides courses for students who want to obtain their associate’s degree in accounting, and also for students who’ve

already graduated and are planning to sit for a CPA license and need more accounting units.

“We are not only transferring students, but bringing them back as a post-baccalaureate, and then still giving them another certificate,” Miranda said. “And they are working with businesses from the beginning. They attend meet-and-greets, and they are being placed in top accounting firms.”

To address career needs of students who wish to improve their English, Irvine Valley College has created a series of English as a second language classes customized for a variety of workplaces. The college is developing noncredit ESL classes for students aiming to work in real estate and an ESL class for students who want to work in computer information management, among others. “We’re developing these noncredit programs to help our local community have a pathway through,” Miranda said.

In another unique partnership Irvine Valley College has worked with Coastline College to develop a pharmacy technology program. “Coastline is offering the hands-on pharmacy piece, and IVC is coming in and doing the contextualized English piece with them to help these individuals through,” Miranda said.

All these collaborations and strategies to help students in their careers are championed by Julianna Barnes, chancellor of the South Orange County Community College District. “As we envision the future of the Orange County workforce, we can look to Saddleback College and Irvine Valley College, which are leading the way in transforming education to meet the needs of a rapidly changing workforce,” said the chancellor, who is on the board of directors for the Orange County Business Council and is co-chair of the OCBC Workforce Development Committee.

“By fostering strong industry partnerships, integrating cutting-edge technology and developing innovative programs, the South Orange County Community College District is not only preparing our students for the jobs of today but also equipping them with the skills and knowledge needed for the careers of tomorrow,” she said. “Through collaboration and forward-thinking strategies, we’re ensuring that our graduates are positioned to thrive in a competitive global economy.”

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Lake Forest Army Recruiters answer questions from students during Irvine Valley College’s Fall Job Fair.

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The Community College Focus section is produced by The Orange County Register for the benefit of its subscribers. While the South Orange County Community College District is the section’s primary advertising sponsor, all editorial decisions are independent of the district’s control.

Published on select Sundays by The Orange County Register
1920 Main Street, Suite 225
Irvine, CA 92614
ocregister.com