



PHOTO BY DREW A. KELLEY, CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

From left, Steven Stenersen, Elizabeth Bergara and Adam McManamy of Santiago Canyon College's Veterans Resource Center

HELPING HAND

VETERANS GET CRITICAL SUPPORT AS THEY TRANSITION TO CIVILIAN LIFE

Resource centers serve more than 1,000

By **Jenelyn Russo**
contributing writer

Serving as a vital hub of support, the Veterans Resource Centers on the campuses of Santa Ana College and Santiago Canyon College provide veterans with the resources and community they need to thrive both academically and personally. Across the two community colleges, more than 1,000 veteran students, spouses and dependents are served each year.

About 10 years ago, Santa Ana College's Veterans Resource Center began with a simple table outside the student center, led by financial aid specialist

Dorothy Swayne and counselors John Acuña and Jane Mathis. Today, SAC's VRC supports nearly 600 students each year in transitioning from the military to college and civilian life.

At the time, SAC was the only California community college with Veterans Upward Bound, funded by the U.S. Department of Education's TRiO Grant. Today, the VUB program helps 125 new student veterans annually at SAC, providing academic skills for postsecondary success through counseling, mentoring and tutoring.

To support more veteran students, SAC was approved for TRiO's Veterans Student Support Services, now serving

120 veterans annually with academic counseling, career exploration and financial aid guidance, including GI Bill benefits.

Additionally, SAC receives grant support from the Santa Ana College Foundation, as well as community partners, such as U.S. Bank, the Stanley W. Ekstrom Foundation, Tierney Center for Veterans Services and Working Wardrobes. These resources translate into assistance for veteran students and their dependents, providing support in academics, basic needs and career readiness.

"We do a lot of work to ensure that all of our students have what they need

to remove the barriers," said Brenda Estrada, SAC Director of Special Programs who has served as the Veterans Resource Center inaugural director since 2016. "We've been able to identify those needs and start closing those gaps, allowing students the opportunity to continue their studies. We're not just helping one student. We're impacting an entire family."

Peer support is an integral part of the assistance the veteran students receive while at SAC, and through the VRC's Peer Advisors for Veteran Education program, current student veterans become peer advisors to new student veterans

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PHOTO COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS

The CNA program also provides training in hospital settings to give students hands-on professional experience.

CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS

Santiago Canyon College continues to expand its health care pathways

Courses include on-the-job training in hospitals

By **Lou Ponsi**
contributing writer

With employment in health care expected to grow faster on average than positions in other sectors, Santiago Canyon College continues to add certificate programs to help meet that demand.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor Statistics, this trend will continue through 2032.

A little more than five years after launching its certified nurse assistant program, SCC is now offering an assistant acute care program, which is designed to train nurse assistants for employment in an acute care facility.

In the CNA certificate program, students earn a nurse assistant certificate and have the knowledge to work in a health care environment, said Chrissy

Gascon, dean of Instruction and Student Services, Continuing Education at Santiago Canyon College.

The curriculum is based on the professional standards established by regulatory agencies, she added.

"A student can take the whole program in one semester and then begin working right away in a health care environment, under the supervision of a nurse, and make a decent wage," Gascon said.

Students enrolling in the nurse assistant acute care program must already have a CNA certificate.

Acute care program students are currently doing their clinical training at Providence St. Joseph in Orange, where they rotate through 10 different units under the supervision of a nurse.

Those include pulmonary renal, clinical decision, mother and baby, or-

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CONTINUING EDUCATION

Boosting English proficiency for health care students

New programs target vocational skills

By Nicole Gregory
contributing writer

Two new coinciding programs are providing unique opportunities for students in health care classes at Santiago Canyon College.

This year, an English Language Learning Pathways grant was awarded to SCC's Continuing Education via the Governor's Care Economy Workforce Development Package. It is a three-year program to develop health care-focused pathways for English language learners, no matter how proficient they are in English.

Upon being awarded the grant funding, the Continuing Education department responded quickly and developed a vocational English-as-a-second-language program, with courses to support students who are pursuing health care careers, said Christine Gascon, dean of Instruction and Student Services in Continuing Education at Santiago Canyon College.

Students who primarily speak a language other than English can find it challenging to participate successfully in programs such as the one for Certified Nursing Assistant. These ESL classes help those students become familiar and comfortable with English terms and language used in health care settings.

"With the introduction of the new ESL for CNA and Caregiving Certificate, students can now participate in content-specific ESL classes that provide them with the language skills needed to be successful in their coursework and prepare them for licensing exams," Gascon said.

At the same time, state Community College Chancellor Sonya Christian introduced a program called the United Domestic Workers Demonstration Project. Santiago Canyon College has partnered with UDW representatives to help



PHOTO COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS

Christine Gascon, dean of Instruction and Student Services in Continuing Education at Santiago Canyon College

union members improve their economic mobility.

The timing coincided with the implementation of the ELL Healthcare Pathways project, allowing UDW members to access the new ESL support classes offered.

The United Domestic Workers of America union has 171,000 members, according to its website, most of whom are women and people of color working as personal home care and family child care providers in California.

Just months after the state grant was approved, Gascon and other SCC administrators met with UDW union representatives to coordinate their efforts to inform potential stu-

dents of this opportunity. The first cohort of students started this fall.

ESL for Healthcare Careers prepares students with the English language skills required to explore medical vocational programs offered through SCC Continuing Education. These programs include classes for careers such as caregiver/personal care aide, nursing assistant, nurse assistant for acute care, medical assistant, behavior technician, lactation educator specialist and medical billing.

A second course, ESL for Patient Care Skills, is designed specifically for students in the Nursing Assistant and Caregiver/Personal Care Aide programs. This class focuses on

medical vocabulary, health care terms and concepts in English, and covers understanding medical instructions, vital signs, body mechanics and patient hygiene assistance, among other topics. Classes are taught online and in person to make them accessible to as many students as possible.

Santiago Canyon College and the union support these students in a variety of ways. "The union provides students with laptops, counseling, transportation and reimburses them for hourly wages," Gascon said. "The union wants the best for their workers."

Students also receive support from SCC – the college offers free bus passes and counseling. Students can also take advantage of SCC's Basic Needs Center on campus and can access telemedicine services. "We have lots of programs to assist students to be able to be in school," Gascon said.


The ESL classes are not only for SCC health care students and UDW members. "They're open to anyone in the public – a friend, a neighbor, anyone," said Gascon, who explained that the UDW union also encourages its members to bring family members into the ESL programs.

The partnership between SCC and United Domestic Workers also enables those who are already employed to move to the next level in a health care career. "We want to help students who need language support in their health care careers," said Gascon, adding that she's seen many SCC students move ahead in their jobs as a result of receiving training and industry-recognized certificates and licenses.

Students can complete stackable certificates, which can lead to promotions and increased wages. One of these pathways includes certificates to become a caregiver/personal care aide, nursing assistant and nurse assistant for acute care. Each time a student completes a certificate, they increase the opportunity to advance in their field.

These pathways can also prepare students to further their education and earn associate and bachelor's degrees in health care, such as licensed vocational nurse and registered nurse).

Given the support that SCC has put in place, English language learners are much more likely to complete their vocational medical training and enter the workforce, Gascon said. The ultimate goal is to provide students with training that will lead to upward socioeconomic mobility and support the local workforce, where there is a high demand in the health field.



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APPRENTICESHIPS

SCC leads statewide push for students to learn while they earn

Career training is thriving, growing

By Larry Urish
contributing writer

When it comes to apprenticeships, everybody wins. Apprentices are paid while learning in-demand occupations; employers appreciate the influx of trained workers; and the community as a whole gets a social and economic boost with higher employment rates and the associated benefits that result.

Knowing this, state leaders have emphasized the growth of apprenticeship programs throughout California. According to California's Division of Apprenticeship Standards, the Golden State is home to nearly 93,000 registered apprentices in 300 educational institutions who are trained through partnerships with some 36,000 participating employers. An estimated 8,000 apprentices graduate every year. Moving forward, these numbers are expected to rise.

Santiago Canyon College continues to be a leader in this statewide push to expand apprenticeship programs. California Community Colleges Chancellor Sonya Christian selected Rancho Santiago Community College District Chancellor Marvin Martinez to promote the Apprenticeship Pathways Demonstration Project, an effort that aligns with Gov. Gavin Newsom's goal to serve 500,000 apprentices by 2029.

Martinez, in turn, named Elizabeth Arteaga, SCC's dean of Apprenticeship Programs, to spearhead the statewide project. This makes sense, since SCC furnishes the second-largest apprenticeship program among the 116 California Community Colleges.

"Only 25 of these colleges have some type of apprenticeship program," Arteaga said. "Our role is to expand that."

SCC programs that focus on the traditional trades — those that involve partnerships between the college and professional trade organizations — lead to jobs as electricians, power linemen, operating engineers, surveyors, machine operators and more. The most popular apprenticeship offered by SCC, carpentry, reflects the ongoing expansion of the college's apprenticeship program in general. Some 3,800 of the 5,700 SCC apprentices are learning a variety of carpentry crafts.

"Our growth is based on how a given industry is doing," Arteaga said. "And carpentry has been doing very well. I'm confident that it will continue to grow."

SCC has partnered with the Southwest Carpenters' Training Fund. "Whenever new apprentices are approved by Southwest Carpenters, they then apply to our college and become our students," Arteaga said. "The apprenticeship candidates are vetted through the carpenters. Once they're admitted, they can choose what carpentry craft they go into. For every craft that we have, students can earn a certificate of achievement and an associate degree."

Santiago Canyon College offers 11 carpentry craft apprenticeships, Arteaga said, including, among other specialties, general carpenter, insulator, millwright, pile driver, plasterer, drywall lather and framer.

Along with traditional trade apprenticeships, SCC is pushing to offer nontraditional apprenticeships, those in occupations that don't involve partnerships with trade organizations. This includes an assortment of professions not normally associated with apprenticeship programs: public accountants, biotechnicians, medical assistants, certified nursing assistants, licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses, water operators and subsurface utility engineering technicians.



SHUTTERSTOCK/DMITRY KALINOVSKY

"These are all currently under development," Arteaga said. "We're building the curriculum. It takes about two years to get an apprenticeship program started on the nontraditional side. It involves working with the state's Division of Apprenticeship Standards."

Another nontraditional apprenticeship program, Early Childhood Education, has been up and running since last spring, Arteaga noted. Students in the 18-month program can work a maximum of 29.5 hours a week while serving as apprentices. Once they finish their training, they receive a California Childhood Development Teacher's Certificate. They then have the option of working in the field or continuing on to earn an associate degree. "We're opening 25 spots every semester for Early Childhood Education students," Arteaga said.

She emphasized the importance of Related Supplemental Instruction, the classroom-based component of any apprenticeship program. "RSI is structured in a way to teach apprentices the technical and theoretical knowledge they need for their occupation," Arteaga said. "It can take the form of online courses or community college classes, and it supplements the on-the-job training that apprentices receive. The recommended amount of RSI is 144 hours per program year. The RSI Program provides funding to support ongoing apprenticeship programs. The funding can be used to pay for RSI costs."

It's been said that any organization's success is a direct reflection of its top leaders, and Santiago Canyon College is no exception. When it comes to the college's apprenticeship programs, SCC's president, Jeannie Kim, has been very helpful, Arteaga said. "Our college president has been extremely supportive," she said. "Without her leadership, we wouldn't have the kind of robust program that we have. She created a separate apprenticeship department and has hired people with apprenticeship backgrounds to run these programs, including a full-time apprenticeship counselor who works directly with the students. Her support has been essential."

Apprenticeship programs in fields like surveying are growing in popularity. SCC's apprenticeship program is the second largest among California community colleges.



PHOTO COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS

Elizabeth Arteaga is leading a project to increase apprenticeships statewide.

Veterans

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coming to campus. These same students go on to impact the SAC community in other ways, such as veteran student Jessica Velez, who is the current Associated Student Government President.

"Transitioning from the military to higher education is difficult," Estrada said. "Giving them that power of self-advocacy and the power to be able to empower their peers is critical. It keeps them engaged."

Top 10 ranking

At Santiago Canyon College, nearly 450 veteran students and their spouses and dependents are served each year through the school's Veterans Resource Center. After a number of years of sharing space, SCC's center is in its third year as its own entity and provides a one-stop shop for the school's veteran students with resources in counseling, tutoring and career assistance.

Since many of the veteran students arrive on campus with prior learning experience and distinct skill sets from their time in the military, SCC has several shorter-term programs that get the students career-ready. Whether it's the Real Estate Program or the school's nationally ranked Water Utility Science Program, the students can enter the workforce earning a livable wage in a brief period of time.

"I think what makes us unique is we have hands-on trade opportunities for

veterans," said LaKyshia Perez, SCC associate dean of Student Services. "Our students are able to take a couple of classes within one semester and start to get jobs making livable wages. They want to use their skill set from the military out in the real world, and I think that's one of the areas where we're striving to help our veterans."

For the past seven years, SCC's Veterans Resource Center has received a Military Friendly designation by Victory, Inc., the trademarked standard that measures an organization's commitment to creating opportunities for the military community. SCC earned a Top 10 Gold / Spouse Friendly distinction for the 2024-2025 academic year in metrics such as graduation rate, GPA, retention rate and emergency funding, placing the school's veterans support program among the top 10 nationally and one of only two community college programs of its kind in California.

"We're really passionate about helping our veterans and dependents, and it shows by (receiving) this award," said Elizabeth Bergara, student services coordinator at SCC's Veterans Office. "It validates our com-



PHOTO BY DREW A. KELLEY, CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

SCC Veterans Resource Center Coordinator Elizabeth Bergara

mitment to our students in helping them transition into higher education."

Earlier this month, Santa Ana College hosted a Veterans Day Resource Fair to recognize those who have served in the community and raise awareness about student veterans on campus.

At 12:30 p.m. on Nov. 4, Santiago Canyon

College will kick off a weeklong celebration of veterans with a Recognition Ceremony on campus.

"They served our country," said Perez, who is also a veteran dependent. "The least we can do is ensure they have the support to continue their lives beyond their service in the military. They contribute to our society in so many ways."

CURRICULUM

Center helps design programs with tomorrow's workforce in mind

Applying its research keeps colleges on top of labor needs

By Lou Ponsi
contributing writer

The two colleges that make up the Rancho Santiago Community College District have been adding good-paying apprenticeship programs to help fill current and future needs in the workforce.

Apprenticeships provide career pathways benefiting workers and employers in specific industries.

Santa Ana College and Santiago Canyon College, for example, have both launched apprenticeships in the field of early childhood development and education.

And a \$1.75 million grant from the U.S. Department of Labor will fund apprenticeships at SCC for students pursuing careers in the water industry.

But before a new apprenticeship or another academic program can be added as a degree or certificate program at a community college, the California Education Code requires the college to demonstrate that there is workforce demand in a particular sector.

That's where the research conducted by the Orange County Center of Excellence comes in.

"There's a whole program approval process that community colleges have to go through," said Jesse Crete, director of the Orange County Center of Excellence. "You have to have labor market information associated with any career technical education program to be able to show what the workforce need is with the curriculum."

Based in the Rancho Santiago Community College District, the center collects data and publishes reports that present a snapshot of the current labor market, its trends, and what programs and training are needed to meet future workforce demands.

This research helps community colleges design their programs to support the state's competitive workforce, Crete said.

Data reports can also help shape educational policy, faculty development and work-based learning opportunities for students.

For example, when SCC implemented its apprenticeship program for students pursuing a career in the water industry, the college relied on a report published by the OC Center of Excellence that the water industry faces an increasing demand for skilled workers in the coming years.

The demand stemmed from the pro-



SHUTTERSTOCK/ JOSE LUIS STEPHENS

The Center for Excellence published a report that found the water industry faces a demand for skilled workers in the coming years.

jected retirement of one-third of its workforce, a need for younger, more racially diverse male and female workers and other factors.

The executive summary of the report recommended that the district should:

"Address current equity gaps in the water/wastewater workforce through targeted marketing efforts and partnership with community colleges, where the student population is more diverse than the current water/wastewater workforce - particularly in age and gender."

SCC recently began offering a non-credit lactation specialist certification program, which trains students to become specialists assisting new and expectant mothers with problems or concerns related to breastfeeding babies and lactating.

That program was also launched

based on the findings of a Center of Excellence report.

The center recently conducted a regional labor market analysis of occupations related to clinical genetics and molecular biological sciences, modern policing and construction management.

Additionally, the center has recently published profiles of advanced manufacturing, life sciences and biotechnology, energy construction and utilities sectors.

The California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office created the Centers of Excellence several years ago. The Orange County Center of Excellence is one of nine Centers of Excellence in the state.

There is a competitive process to determine which region's community college will host the center for its specific region, Crete said.

"Because the work that we do is so specific to each of our regions, they want us in the region, not just sitting up in Sacramento at the Chancellor's Office," Crete said.

The Orange County Center of Excellence was also receiving funding from an alternate funding source known as the Regional Strong Workforce program, which provides a recurring investment of \$248 million to grow career technical education in the nation's largest workforce development system of 116 colleges.

Acting on a recommendation of the California Community Colleges Board of Governors, the governor and state legislature approved the Strong Workforce Program in 2016.

Orange County and Los Angeles County once made up a single region, but in 2018, Orange County split off to become its own region.

SANTIAGO CANYON

Real estate event connects students with industry professionals

RSCCD Communications

The SCC Real Estate Program hosted its third Real Estate Career Information Event on Oct. 16.

The event, created and headed by professor Alana Gates, allowed SCC students to meet with dozens of industry professionals who have excelled in their fields. The industries represented included leasing agents, foreclosure specialists, title examiners, escrow officers, compliance officers, home inspectors and mortgage loan originators.

The professionals gave students tips for getting started in the real estate industry and how to build a successful real estate career. A highlight was a visit from the California Association of Community Managers, which is working with Gates as she is creating a series of classes for students.

SCC counselors and faculty also attended to connect with students regarding applicable programs.

The event series began in Fall 2023 and drew interest from students and the real estate community, with approximately 30 industry professionals attending. Interest grew among the student population and the real estate community, thanks to the efforts of Professor Gates, who decided to host another event the following semester.

The next Real Estate Event is set for Spring 2025.



PHOTOS COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS

Tents attended by different organizations await students at the real estate career event.



Alana Gates, left, professor of real estate at Santiago Canyon College, organized the event.



Participating organizations included real estate professionals, student groups and administrators.

COMMUNITY

Trunk or Treat welcomes more than 3,000

RSCCD Communications

More than 3,000 ghosts, princesses, ghouls, heroes, minions and wizards descended on the campus of Santiago Canyon College for the college's third annual Trunk or Treat event, held Oct. 18.

The event, hosted by the Santiago Canyon College Foundation, had booths where SCC educational departments, faculty, administrators, staff and community members handed out candy and trinkets to children young and old. Foundation Executive Director Kathy Jennison said local retail chains in Orange and Anaheim Hills donated seven pallets of candy for the event.

"We are grateful for our community partners who donated candy and hosted trunks, as well as employees of the college, who helped make the event a success," Jennison said. "Events like this are a great way to open the campus to our neighboring community, which allows potential students and their families to get a preview of what a special place SCC truly is."



Santiago Canyon College hosts its annual Trunk or Treat event on Oct. 18 in Orange.

PHOTOS BY DREW A. KELLEY, CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER



Ava Contreras, left, and Sosan Hussainali of the SCC Chem Club give out candy during the Trunk or Treat event.



Jenna Darwish, center, along with her cohort of Minions, gives out candy.



A volunteer offers up spooky eyeball candies during the event.



Sisters rock their slinky dog costume.



Basti Lopez wore a bunny suit for her candy-dispensing role.

Health care

FROM PAGE 1

thopedics, general surgery, medical telemetry, oncology, labor delivery and emergency unit.

By being exposed to every specialty, students might be drawn to one particular specialty and pursue a position in that specialty, she said.

"St. Joseph has been very welcoming and supportive of our students, giving them access to train at the different floors," said Cristina Morones, assistant professor of career education. "The goal of this is to upskill our students so that they can then transition from working in skilled nursing facilities into hospitals and then, hopefully, a pay increase, because we always want our students to move up and make a good living wage to improve their living conditions and help support their educational and personal goals."

Training in a hospital setting also puts the students in a space where they

can network and make connections in a hospital, Morones said.

"So really the goal is to give students access, to upscale them and to, hopefully, job placement at hospitals and also wage increases," she said.

SCC started offering health care career pathway programs about 15 years ago, Gascon said.

SCC will continue to focus on health care pathways, Gascon said, especially since the college is in a city where there are four large hospitals and a county that is up and coming in the health care arena.

"There are a lot of very good jobs for our students," Gascon said. "When we go out and ask our community what they need, this is what they want."

SCC was recently awarded a California Apprenticeship Initiative grant to create apprenticeships for its health care program. The initiative is intended to provide community college apprenticeship program students with a direct path to credit certificates and degrees.

SCC is currently developing a li-



PHOTO COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS

The SCC certified nurse assistant program is in its fifth year, offering specialized training for health care workers.

censed vocational nursing program, Gascon said.

The college is simply responding to the needs of the local hospitals, she said.

Other medical occupation certificates offered at SCC include behavior techni-

cian, care giver/personal aid, lactation educator specialist and medical billing.

Gascon said a possible health care pathway could look like this:

Caregiver to CNA, to CNA acute care, to LVN and then eventually earn an RN.

RATINGS

Santiago Canyon College ranked No. 1 HSI community college in Orange County

RSCCD Communications

Santiago Canyon College keeps opening doors of opportunity a bit wider for Hispanic college students.

SCC's Hispanic Serving Institution designation enables the college to apply for and receive federal grants, which fund valuable resources for its students—such as paid internships, peer mentorship programs, specialized academic counseling, and initiatives including the \$3 million HSI STEM Grant SCC received in 2021 and the \$1.7 million HSI Title V grant to establish the “Nuestro Lugar” Latine center at SCC.

Niche.com, an independent college

ranking higher education research outlet, ranked SCC as the No.1 HSI community college in Orange County, No.7 in California and #8 in the nation. Counted among four-year universities, SCC is the 33rd-best HSI out of 377 institutions surveyed in its recently released 2025 rankings.

The rankings were compiled with an emphasis on academic quality, diversity, quality of instruction and student life using the most recent provisional data available from multiple sources including the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System through the National Center for Education Statistics and the Office of Post-Secondary Education through the U.S. Department of Education.

Niche.com also ranked Santiago Can-

yon College as the number one community college out of the nine in Orange County, the 8th-best community college among 118 in California and the 16th-best community college among 755 surveyed in America.

“HSIs play a crucial role in providing opportunities for Latine students, helping them achieve their academic and professional dreams while fostering diversity and inclusion,” said SCC President Jeanne G. Kim.

“As a college, we are unwavering in our commitment to cultivating a sense of belonging—building an environment through teaching, learning, and services that respects and values multiple cultural and racial experiences and perspectives.

At SCC, we want all students and employees to feel included and part of a supportive community,” she said.

“The rankings amongst community colleges in the nation and state, as well as in comparison to our peers in Orange County serve as a confirming snapshot of our intentional focus and sustained effort to create a campus climate where students from underrepresented groups can thrive,” Kim said. “We are also prepared to engage in the challenging conversations necessary to effect real change. Together, as a community, we will lean into these discussions, aligning them with our Comprehensive Educational Plan, to achieve the outcomes we have set for ourselves.”



PHOTO BY DREW A. KELLEY, CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

ASG Vice President Daniel Barragan and Ashley Gonzales welcome a new student to campus on SCC's first day of classes on Aug. 19.

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