

# COMMUNITY COLLEGE FOCUS

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Elizabeth Rocha, left, a Green & Gold congressional aide for U.S. Rep. Lou Correa, exchanges a challenge coin with Tyler Rodriguez, vice president of Santiago Canyon College's Student Veterans of America chapter.

## SERVICES

# SANTIAGO CANYON COLLEGE ANSWERS THE CALL OF DUTY FOR VETERANS

## Housing bill before Congress a current issue

By **Larry Urish**  
contributing writer

Community colleges play a significant role in helping military veterans transition from service to civilian life and higher education. Santiago Canyon College is no exception, assisting veterans with financial guidance, veteran-specific orientation programs and career advising, peer mentorship, disability support and more.

In fact, year in and year out, SCC has gone above and beyond the call of duty, earning the "Gold-Level Military Friendly School" recognition by Military Friendly, a national veterans-support nonprofit, placing it among the top-performing colleges in the country for veteran support. This ranking is based on such factors as retention and graduation rates, job placement outcomes, financial support programs and the overall quality

of student veteran services. The ongoing help also includes community outreach in support of student veterans. For example, SCC's Veterans Resource Center recently hosted staffers from the office of Lou Correa, the U.S. representative for California's 46th congressional district. They discussed several key issues, including a bill before the House of Representatives that aims to change how the monthly housing stipend is calculated for veterans who pursue their education solely through online learning.

Currently, student veterans enrolled in online classes receive only 50% of the federal monthly housing allowance, compared with student vets who take at least one in-person college class. If the Expanding Access for Online Veteran Students Act (H.R. 3753) passes, this 50% limitation would be removed, and fully online students would receive the same housing stipend as the others.

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Staff members from the office of U.S. Rep. Lou Correa meet with student veterans and members of the Santiago Canyon College Veteran Advisory Council during a listening session Jan. 30 at the SCC Veterans Resource Center.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL GOULDING, CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

Writer and director Ryan Coombs, left, watches as Jesus Arce goes through the script of his play, "Earthquake Weather," during the first day of rehearsals March 5 at Santiago Canyon College.

## ARTS

# 'Festival of One-Act Plays' spotlights SCC's first-time writer-directors

## Theater professor launches project

By **Greg Mellen**  
contributing writer

Ryan Coombs, 42, has been a fan and patron of small and black box theater for years.

"I started reading plays as literature. I love reading plays," he says. "That's what led me out to places like the Maverick in Fullerton, the Chance Theater and the Long Beach Playhouse."

In fact, Coombs says even though he would occasionally spend \$90 to \$100 to see major productions at places like the Segerstrom Center, he was often

more moved by a small production with an \$18 to \$20 ticket.

So, when a call for submissions went out for one-act plays to be staged at Santiago Canyon College's black box Little Theatre, he leapt at the chance, turning in not one but THREE original scripts for consideration.

In May, Coombs will be one of six first-time playwright/directors to unveil his work at the inaugural Festival of Original One-Act Plays.

Virginia Mora, who says her "golden life," would be as a working writer of fiction and drama, is similarly thrilled

THEATER » PAGE 5

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FIRST STEPS AT SCC

# Alum shares how he worked to get his dream job

## UCLA degree led to high-paying career

By Nicole Gregory  
contributing writer

Santiago Canyon College alum Carlos Martinez, 22, works at a software gaming company with a six-figure salary and credits SCC's support services and counseling for setting him on the career path he'd dreamed about since middle school.

From SCC, Martinez transferred to UCLA and then landed his dream job with Roblox.

He hasn't forgotten the support he received at SCC and frequently speaks to current students to share with them his mistakes and successes along the way, so that they too might forge their path to a career they love.

From an early age, Martinez knew he wanted to go to college to learn more about computer technology, "but I didn't know how to go about it," he said. "My parents were born and raised in Mexico and had no clue about the American education system." Thinking it was a matter of taking AP classes and getting good grades, he applied to 15 top engineering universities while in high school and was rejected by every one of them.

That's when he turned to SCC. "Right when I got to SCC, I knew I needed to find as many resources and support services as I could," he said. He participated in the TRIO program — the name for the three parts of a federal program that provide services to first-generation, low-income and disabled college students.

"Carlos was so laser-focused," said Cristina Márquez, coordinator for student services at SCC. She oversees approximately 140 students in the TRIO program each year, guiding them toward their goals. "He was so mature for his young age," she said. "He knew

what he wanted, and he was hungry to get the support that he needed."

"In Cristina I gained a support system," Martinez said. "She helped me take workshops, visit other campuses and find out about research and internship opportunities."

Though he was reluctant to apply for the internships, thinking he'd never get chosen, he was encouraged by Márquez to apply — she knew he had high grades, as well as ambition. "I said, 'Carlos, you got this,'" she said.

And she was right. Martinez was accepted for multiple internships, including one at the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena and one at Qualcomm, the multinational technology corporation based in San Diego.

As he looked to transfer to a university, Martinez got help from SCC transfer specialist Miguel Luna, who explained the best classes for his education and career goals, and how to prepare for university applications.

This time, Martinez applied to just a handful of universities and was accepted at UCLA, USC and UC Berkeley. He chose to transfer to UCLA, a dream he once considered unachievable.

But attending a large university was at first difficult.

"It was a completely different experience from SCC," he said. "It was a lot harder to get individual help and hard to integrate myself because most of the other students already had their groups set up."

He solved this problem by seeking out other transfer students like himself. "We made our own little group," Martinez said. "We took the same classes, hung out together, were in dorms together. The thing that helped me the most were these friends," Martinez said. "We worked really hard, day and night."

While at UCLA, he got a LinkedIn software engineer internship in Sunnyvale, and as graduation neared, Martinez started applying for jobs. One was at Roblox, the online gaming company. A recruiter reached out to him, and in 2025, offered Martinez a job as software



PHOTO COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS

Carlos Martinez credits his time at SCC for giving him the support he needed to boost him into a top-tier four-year university.

engineer with a salary of \$200,000.

"Honestly, this is truly my dream job and dream position," Martinez said. "If I could choose any job in the world, this is what I would choose."

Though he now lives in San Francisco, far from his Southern California home, Martinez's parents are thrilled for him. "They sacrificed a lot," Martinez said. "I did it for all the people around me, including my family."

Back at SCC, Cristina Marquez is in regular communication with Martinez and invites him to speak, via Zoom, to current SCC students so that he can explain how he got to where he is today.

Martinez is happy to share his experience with them. "If they can see someone who has a similar background, with parents who don't know anything about the education system and don't have the money, maybe I can inspire them and help them with tips," Martinez said. "I tell them about my mistakes, and what I did right."

He knows this kind of personal sharing can be motivating and remembers listening to older students share their journeys. "I was always inspired by their stories, and getting fired up and excited helped drive me to get as far as I have," Martinez said.



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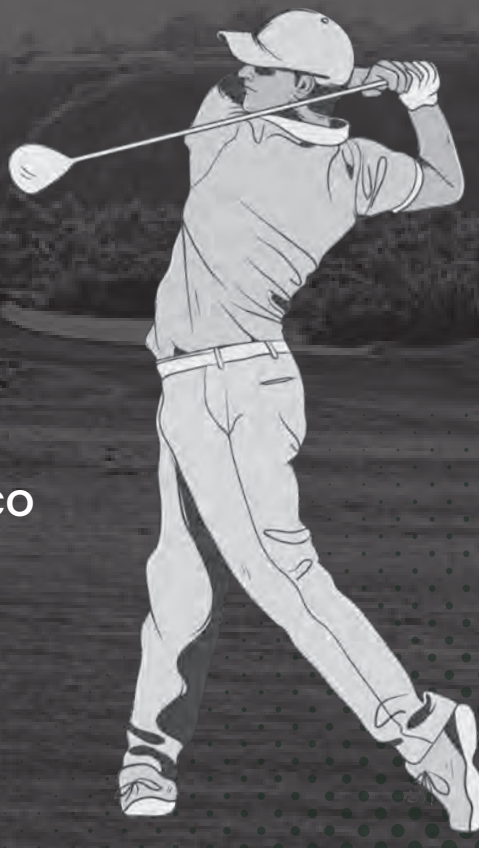


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## SPEAKER

# Journalist talks about the concerning impacts of AI

## Questionable industry practices detailed

By Lou Ponsi  
contributing writer

When Santiago Canyon College President Jeannie Kim and professor and Distance Education coordinator Scotty James heard investigative reporter Karen Hao speak at the California Community Colleges Futures Summit in Santa Clara last September, the educators knew instantly they wanted to invite Kao to speak at SCC.

In her recently published book, "Empire of AI: Dreams and Nightmares in Sam Altman's OpenAI," Hao chronicles the shift of OpenAI from a nonprofit organization to a tech giant and reveals the enormous societal and environmental costs of developing artificial intelligence.

Hao, a journalist who has won awards for her writing and podcasts, accepted Kim's invitation, and on March 4, shared the findings of her book to 70 in-person attendees in the auditorium in the Humanities Building on campus, with another 205 watching on Zoom and 70 tuning in on YouTube.

"It was super important (to have her speak at SCC)," said James, who moderated Hao's talk and panel discussion that followed. "I'm a big AI advocate and I think that it's very beneficial technology. ... After reading her book, the impact that it's having, both the environmental impact and sociological impacts, are really concerning to me. If you're going to use AI, you have the obligation also to help to try and mitigate those negative impacts of AI."

Hao opened her talk by taking the audience, not to Silicone Valley, but to Nairobi, Kenya, where workers who were employed by an AI outsourcing firm were tasked with labeling some of the most disturbing material, including violent and sexual content involving abuse and children.

"None of this is magic," Hao said. "It's actually teams of workers ... who spend hours a day tracing out the contours of all of the objects on the street and labeling them accordingly."

This work was central to the success of ChatGPT, Hao said, but the pay was next to nothing — bordering on slave labor — between \$1.46 and \$3.74 an hour.

The work took an extreme emotional toll on the workers.

Hao said the exploitation of workers is the "expected consequence of the way that Silicon Valley takes a scale-at-all-costs approach to developing AI."

Such exploitive practices are the central argument of Hao's book: Companies such as OpenAI function like modern empires, wielding economic and political power to the detriment of labor, education, geopolitics and environment.

"First, they lay claim to resources that are not their own, the data of private individuals, the intellectual property of artists, writers and creators," Hao said. "Second, they exploit an extraordinary amount of labor. Third, they monopolize knowledge production."

The most prominent AI systems today are not the most socially beneficial ones, Hao said.

Large-scale generative AI systems such as ChatGPT represent "the worst trade-offs in the portfolio of existing AI technologies," she said.

As AI firms build their empires at extraordinary cost on large swaths of society, Hao offers some potential solutions.

Hao said that while society can benefit from AI, the benefits cannot come "at the cost to our democracy."

The solution is not to abandon AI but to change the political and economic structure from which AI is developed,

the author said.

And rather than relying on large-scale exploitive AI firms, Hao suggests developing smaller, more efficient, task-specific systems, which she calls "bicycles of AI."

Hao also said individuals and communities should take a collective role in shaping AI's future and that AI systems should be developed differently from the beginning.

Following Hao's talk, James moderated a panel discussion with Hao and SCC students.

SCC student Maya Everakes, a computer science major, was among the panel participants.

Everakes came across Hao's book while researching a class assignment on the impacts of social media on society.

"I was just so excited," Everakes said. "And I totally obsessed over it. There was a time when I described Karen Hao as my favorite modern author before I even knew that she was going to come to this school. I'm so excited about this event. I just really loved it."



PHOTOS COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS

Award-winning journalist and author Karen Hao speaks during a keynote discussion on artificial intelligence March 4 at Santiago Canyon College.



From left, students Kailyn Biu and Maya Everakes join moderator Scotty James, an SCC professor of educational technologies, and keynote speaker Karen Hao during a Q&A session.

## Vets

FROM PAGE 1

"Right now, because of the zip code where our college is (one factor in the federal payout calculation), in-person students here are awarded close to \$3,800 a month," said Adam McManamy, adviser of the Student Veterans of America's SCC chapter and student services coordinator of TRiO Veterans, another support resource on campus. "But for online students, they receive half of the national average, which is only around \$900. That's because that national average isn't close to what in-person student veterans receive in this local zip code."

SCC business administration major Celina Busbee, a Navy veteran, is among the thousands of students throughout the country affected by this limitation. "Since I rely on the GI Bill for income, I have to take in-person classes. The (online-only) option isn't financially feasible. But if the bill were to pass, it would give me a lot more flexibility as a mother; it would allow for a dramatic change in my path."

This online-only limitation is particularly stressful during intersession periods, the gaps between semesters every winter and summer. "Getting a physical class on campus at this time can be very difficult, since during these short periods, the number of classes offered is severely limited," said Marine veteran and English major Tyler Rodriguez, vice president of SCC's Student Veterans of America chapter. "And during these shorter periods, the in-person classes are pretty much every weekday, which is even more limiting."

While Santiago Canyon College serves the entire student population, campus leaders remain aware of how student veterans must deal with the unique stresses related to shifting from

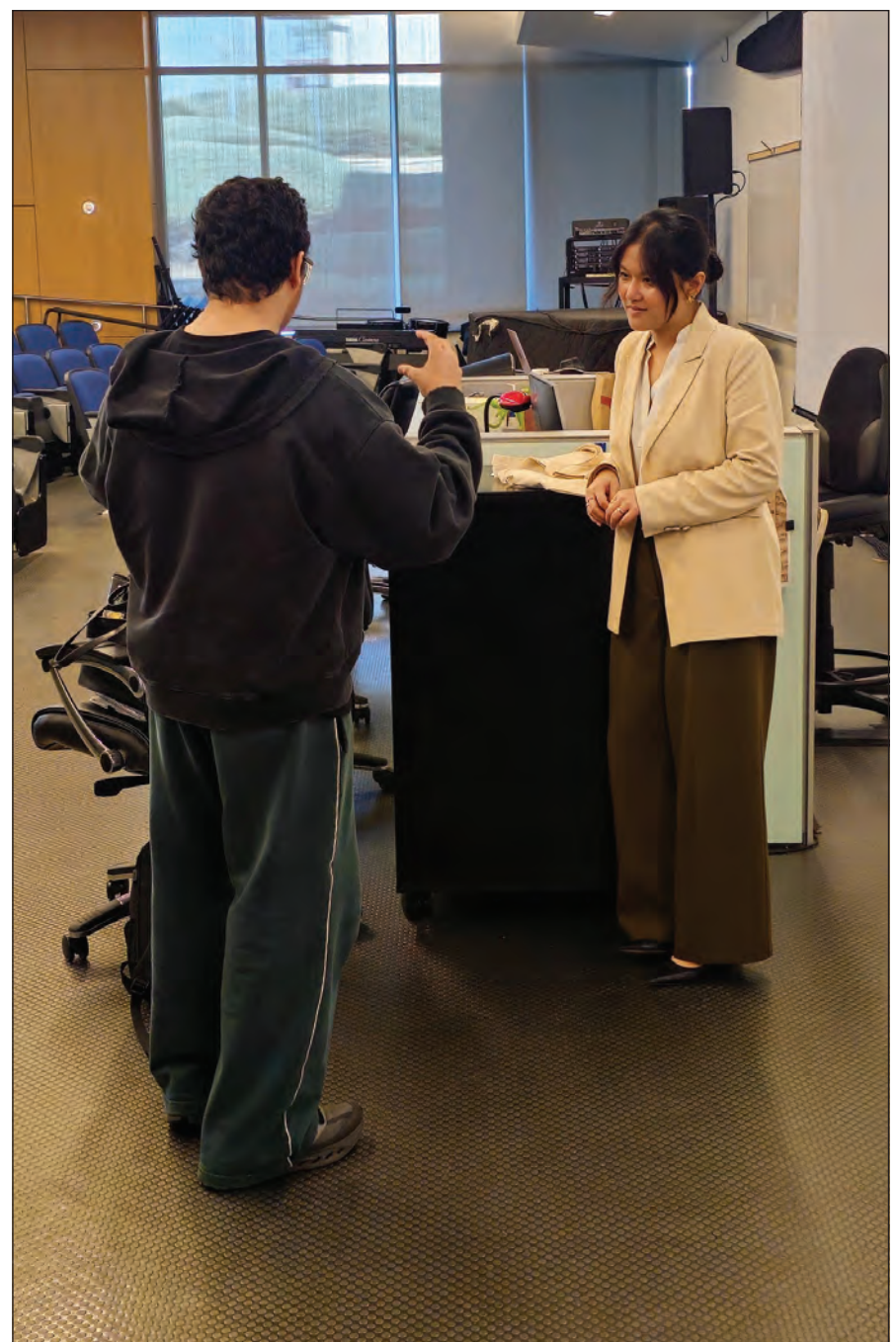
military to student life. For example, many keep on-campus resources — including the Veterans Resource Center, Student Veterans of America and TRiO Veterans — up to speed in terms of in-person classes.

"Some of the deans in particular are aware of the criteria that the veterans need, so they're always helpful in letting us know when in-person classes are open," McManamy said. "And many of the professors are pretty good with this as well."

SCC maintains its top reputation in the student-veteran community for several reasons. The college goes far beyond helping with enrollment and GI Bill paperwork, taking a holistic approach to student veteran support by addressing academic, financial, health and social needs for veterans as well as their family members and dependents. In addition, the college has partnered with Outside the Wire, a counseling program administered by U.S. Vets that provides on-site mental health services for veterans and their loved ones. Veteran peer support and peer mentorship remain paramount on campus. And SCC created the Soldiers to Scholars Fund, which furnishes scholarships, book vouchers, emergency grants and more.

Both Rodriguez and Busbee remain grateful for the support that Santiago Canyon College provides for veterans. "Being on campus and working at the Veterans Resource Center has been amazing," Rodriguez said. "Our office is looking more like Grand Central Station every day. More and more veterans come in, hang out and study. It's a great environment."

"It's not just a job for the staff here at the college, it's a passion," Busbee said. "They really enjoy helping the veterans and providing resources. I didn't know what my path was before coming to SCC, but now I know I want to help other veterans, since being here has really changed my life."



Karen Hao speaks with attendees and signs copies of her book, "Empire of AI."

## CONTINUING HER EDUCATION

## Iranian-born student finds the support she needs to fuel her passions

## Photography, art and small business

By Jenelyn Russo  
contributing writer

When Mahrooz Daghighi arrived at Santiago Canyon College in 2012, she was continuing an educational journey that began years earlier in her native Iran. During her time at SCC, Daghighi found a community that supported her goals of improving her English, exploring her passion for photography and art, and building a growing small business. Those achievements are now guiding her toward a new goal of earning an associate's degree from SCC, with plans to transfer to a four-year university.

The first landing spot for Daghighi and her family when they came to the United States from Iran in 2001 was Florida. Eight years later, a move brought them west to Southern California.

Daghighi had earned a bachelor's degree in Iran and had begun taking classes while in Florida, but she soon discovered her coursework was not transferable. Discouraged but not willing to give up, she started over and found SCC's Division of Continuing Education to be the perfect place to strengthen her English and expand her photography skills.

Through a variety of tuition-free courses, SCC's continuing education ESL classes helped Daghighi, whose native language is Farsi, build confidence in speaking, writing and understanding English.

"The instructors were patient and supportive, and the environment felt welcoming and encouraging," Daghighi said. "Those classes gave me the foundation I needed not only for academics, but also for communicating in everyday life and eventually starting my own business."

A love of art and photography has always been part of who Daghighi is, so while taking ESL classes, she also enrolled in continuing education photography and Photoshop courses. With encouragement from SCC instructors such as photographer Jon Haverstick, she gained the assurance she needed to take her skills seriously, and as a result, she launched a freelance photography

business as well as an Etsy storefront (mahroozphotography.com, @mahrooz-photography).

"The ESL classes helped me communicate with clients and the photography courses helped me strengthen my technical and creative skills," Daghighi said. "With guidance from my instructor, I felt prepared to move forward professionally."

Fast forward to 2025, and Daghighi, 54, made the decision to dedicate more time and focus to her passion for art and education. She returned to SCC, and this time, she enrolled in for-credit art classes with the goal of earning an associate's degree in art for transfer to a four-year institution.

The shift from noncredit to credit courses has not been without challenges. Daghighi is one of the older students in her classes, which initially left her feeling uncomfortable and unsure of herself. But the experience has pushed her out of her comfort zone and made the journey meaningful.

"Over time, I realized that age does not matter when it comes to education and passion," Daghighi said. "In fact, I believe I have become a source of motivation for some of the younger students. I show them that it is never too late to follow your dreams, start over or continue learning. That realization gave me even more confidence."

During her first semester back last fall, Daghighi applied for an on-campus position and was hired as a student assistant in SCC's Business Career Education Division. Her photography skills were the perfect match to help capture photos and create social media posts highlighting BCE students and events. As this is her first job working for someone else in the U.S., she is appreciative of the supportive environment and the kindness of the staff.

"It has been great working with her," said SCC Dean of Business Career and Education Denise Foley of Daghighi. "She is very creative and responsive to requests for edits. We are very happy to have her assistance this semester."

Daghighi's experience at SCC has become part of her family's educational journey, as both of her children have also attended the college. Her daughter transferred to UC Irvine and is now completing her master's degree in psychology at Pepperdine University. Her son



PHOTO COURTESY OF MAHROOZ DAGHIGHI

Mahrooz Daghighi, who earned her bachelor's degree in Iran, is studying at SCC with a goal of transferring to a four-year university.

transferred to Cal State Long Beach and is working toward his bachelor's degree in business.

Daghighi is grateful to her husband and her children for their constant support and encouragement throughout her journey. She hopes to turn her passion for art into a career in education, teaching creative skills to children or older adults. The Anaheim Hills resident is particularly interested in developing painting and crafting programs for seniors as a form of art therapy. She believes that art is more than just creative expression, it is a source of healing, and she hopes to one day combine that be-

lief with service to her community. She credits the opportunities and programs at SCC for opening the doors to pursuing these goals.

"SCC has impacted my life in so many ways," Daghighi said. "It helped me rebuild my academic path, improve my English, grow professionally and find confidence in myself again. It gave me not just education, but community. I truly love everything about this campus. It is friendly, caring, organized and filled with supportive faculty and staff. I sincerely hope to continue working at SCC in the future and remain part of this wonderful educational environment."

## BLACK HISTORY MONTH

## English course inspired 'Researching Sinners' exhibit

RSCCD Communications

Santiago Canyon College students expressed their take on history, culture, and identity through art and research in a unique English composition course built around the Academy Award-nominated film "Sinners." The resulting student work was featured in a campus exhibit titled "Researching Sinners," displayed during February in the Lorenzo A. Ramirez Library in recognition of Black History Month.

The exhibit highlighted projects created by students in English C1000, SCC's first-year composition course, taught by Professor Kathy Silvey. After first seeing "Sinners," Silvey redesigned the curriculum for her Fall 2025 course around the film's themes, encouraging students to research historical and cultural topics reflected in the story.

"I decided that I needed to build an entire C1000 course around the film," Silvey said. "The movie was intersectional and touched on many different topics, which gave students the opportunity to explore areas such as history, ethnic studies, gender studies, and music while developing their research and writing skills."

Students selected from multiple research themes connected to the film, including Southern Gothic literature, Blues music, war history, gender studies, diaspora, hoodoo traditions, and representations of vampires in literature and film. The topics encouraged students to connect the film's narrative with broader historical and cultural contexts.

To present their research, students were given creative freedom in how they shared their work. Some projects took the form of traditional essays or presentations, while others were expressed through artwork, music, or multimedia formats. The exhibit showcased many of these student-created pieces alongside explanatory text connecting the artwork to the research topics explored in class.

"The fact that the film brought together so many different topics meant students had a lot of freedom," Silvey said. "They could choose what interested them and also decide how to present it, through artwork, music, or presentations. That creativity helped them engage more deeply with the research."

The "Researching Sinners" display also featured a curated collection of library resources connected to the course themes. Silvey collaborated with SCC Librarian Linda Azen Martin, who helped coordinate the exhibit and curate materials displayed in the library's central glass cabinet, including novels, nonfiction books, DVDs, and CDs of Blues music connected to the course topics.

A portion of the exhibit highlight-



PHOTOS COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS

Professor Kathy Silvey stands beside the "Researching Sinners" exhibit at the Lorenzo A. Ramirez Library at Santiago Canyon College. The display featured student research and creative projects from Silvey's English C1000 composition course.

ed a newly developed Ethnic Studies Special Collection, created through an Ethnic Studies Department grant overseen by Professor Erika Gutierrez.

Student artwork and projects from the course were displayed on the library's first floor back wall and whiteboard throughout February.

Aside from the library and the English and Ethnic Studies departments, the exhibit was part of a series of Black History Month programs sponsored by the SCC Umoja program under the leadership of Dr. George Parker.



Silvey gestures toward a student artwork displayed as part of the "Researching Sinners" exhibit.



A display case features books and media related to the "Researching Sinners" exhibit, which showcased students' work based on themes in the Academy Award-nominated film "Sinners."

# Theater

FROM PAGE 1

to get a chance to debut her work.

Mora, who works in health care in Riverside County, says she got into theater arts during the depths of the COVID-19 pandemic to “find some joy.”

At Santiago Canyon College she has acted, crewed and stage managed, so writing and directing were the next logical step.

Mora, who is working toward a four-year degree in English and Creative Writing at California Baptist College, said she loves the idea of “creating this little world and seeing how people react.”

## A full slate

The ambitious six-play project was launched by theater arts professor Sheryl Donchey and Roberta Kay Smith of the Division of Community Education. Donchey said the concept arose in January while she was collaborating on a play with Smith and just bloomed organically from there.

Donchey says she initially planned to direct one of her original plays as she did last year with “Tis Shakespeare Time.”

Instead, a quick call for student submissions was put out, and 14 plays were submitted within a month.

Auditions began in February, which Donchey said “brought a lot of new students into us,” both from the tradition-

al theater arts courses and community education.

“We have a large contingent of older students,” Donchey said, including Coombs and Mora.

Donchey was delighted with the fast and enthusiastic response, and six plays, ranging from 15 to 30 minutes with casts of three to six actors, were selected.

“These are all brand new original productions,” said Donchey.

She said submissions ranged from comedy to tragedy to science fiction to Western and even a “Godotish” absurdist tragicomedy in the style of “Waiting for Godot.”

## Original plays

Coombs describes his play, “Earthquake Weather,” as a comedy where “existential dread meets personal responsibility.” It is reminiscent of the comedy of Woody Allen and Larry David, he said.

The play features a neurotic protagonist who wants his girlfriend to move in, in part, to clean his shower, which he fears is growing black mold and posing a danger to him.

He also submitted a relationship drama entitled “Grays,” but says Donchey selected “Earthquake Weather” because it was quirky and she had other straight-forward dramas.

Donchey compares Coombs’ writing to that of a budding Neil Simon and would like to see him enter his work to the South Coast Repertory, which has professional programs and contests supporting emerging playwrights.

Coombs has established a com-

fortable career as an administrator working with the U.S Department of Agriculture but has amped up his after-hours writing.

“I think the things that really move me are the arts, whether it’s comedy or (serious), I want to be part of it,” he says.

Mora’s play, “The Stillness That Swallows Sound,” she describes as a “mythical drama.” The play, inspired by Dante’s “Inferno,” has a couple of souls in the ninth circle of hell observing how the minor cuts people inflict upon each other in a relationship can compound and lead to dire consequences.

Although Donchey admits it is “going to be difficult to juggle” six productions simultaneously, all in once-a-week classes, she is excited by the challenge.

## Just the start?

If the festival goes as well as Donchey hopes, it could become an annual event.

According to Donchey, theater arts,

one of three disciplines, along with music and dance, in the Performing Arts Department, has been staging performances for the past 13 years.

“We started with Musical Christmas concerts in the gym until we got our black box theater,” Donchey said.

The plays will be staged on back-to-back weekends, May 15-17 and May 22-24, at the Little Theatre, Building D-121, with evening and matinee performances to be announced. Ticket prices will be \$12 for students and senior staff, \$15 for general admission. Tickets will be available later in April and early May on cur8.com or at the box office.

After writing for years as a hobby, Coombs said he hesitated to call himself a writer. That’s why the chance to present his work is an important validation.

“Sometimes it felt like the imposter syndrome,” he said of his writing, “because I’m not getting paid. I think maybe this will give me just enough bravado.”



PHOTOS BY MICHAEL GOULDING, CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

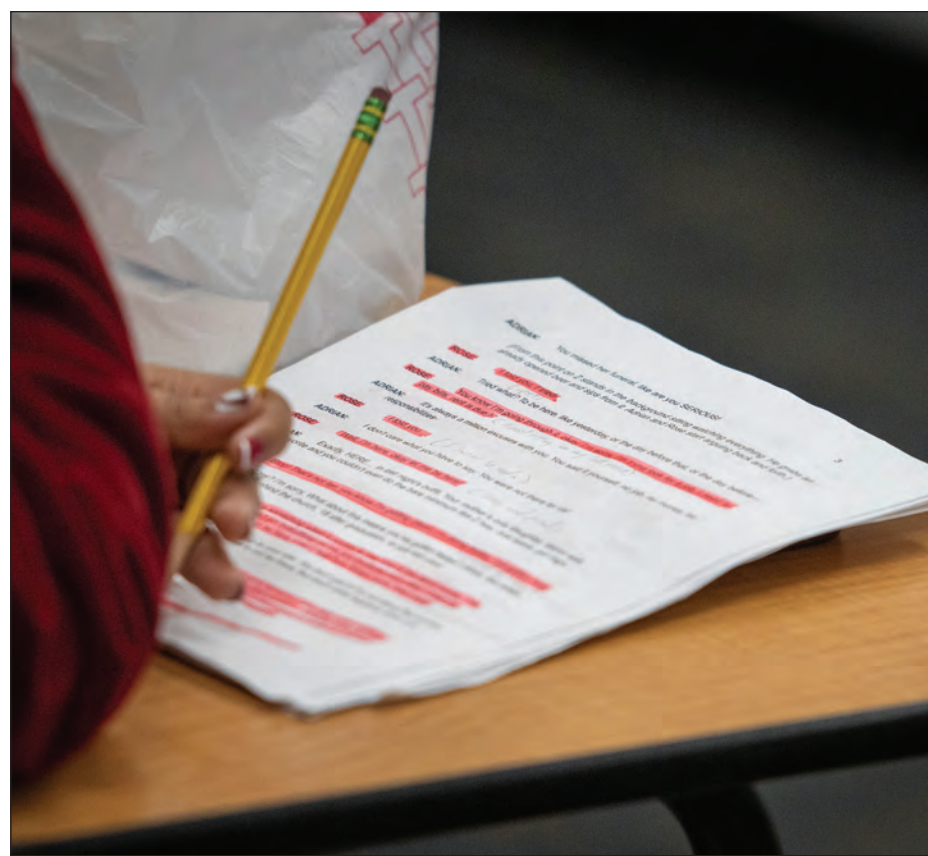
Roberta Kay Smith, an instructor with the community theater education program, works with students during the first day of rehearsals at Santiago Canyon College.



Melissa Vidana measures actor John Hatherill for wardrobe.



Jesus Arce, left, rehearses a scene from the play “Earthquake Weather” with Nick Clute.



Actors go over the script for “Our Precious Memories” by Anthony Hurtado.



Melissa Vidana measures actor Apricot Burke for wardrobe.

**BASKETBALL**

# Men's team ends season, 21-9, with regional final appearance

*RSCCD Communications*

The Santiago Canyon College men's basketball team capped another successful season with a strong postseason run, finishing 21-9 overall and advancing to the 3C2A Southern Regional Final.

The Hawks' season ended March 7 with an 85-69 loss at Cerritos College. Santiago Canyon was led by freshman Paris Lassiter, who scored 16 points, while Jayden Oei added 13 points and Matt Mendias contributed 12 points and six rebounds.

SCC reached the regional final following a 90-87 victory over Antelope Valley College on Feb. 28 in the second round of the Southern Regional Playoffs. The contest was tied 78-78 with two minutes remaining before the Hawks delivered key plays down the stretch. Lassiter came up with a crucial steal late in the game, setting up a Hawks possession that shifted momentum.

Freshman Dominic Bolton then put SCC back in front with a jumper and completed an and-one play, converting the free throw to give the Hawks a three-point advantage in the closing minutes. Bolton, who also recorded a four-point play earlier in the contest, made several

key baskets late to help secure the win and send Santiago Canyon to the regional final.

The Hawks entered the postseason as the No. 6 seed in the 3C2A Southern Regional Playoffs after tying for second place in the Orange Empire Conference with a 9-5 conference record. The postseason appearance continued the program's nine-year playoff streak; Santiago Canyon has qualified for the Southern Regional Playoffs every season since the program's inception.

SCC also earned its ninth consecutive top-10 playoff seed and its third straight top-eight seed, finishing with its fifth 20-win season in the last six years.

The Hawks were led throughout the season by First Team All-Conference freshman Jacob De Armas, who averaged 15.1 points, 4.1 assists, and a team-best 1.9 steals per game. De Armas recorded 21 double-digit scoring games, including a career-high 27 points against Copper Mountain, and finished the season leading the conference with 53 steals while ranking second with 114 assists.

Additional key contributors included sophomore Ryan Weber (11.1 points and 5.7 rebounds per game) and Bolton (10.9 points per game; led the OEC a 44.9% three-point shooting percentage).



PHOTO COURTESY OF CERRITOS COLLEGE

Santiago Canyon College's Jacob De Armas (4) drives the ball against a Cerritos College defender during a 3C2A Southern Regional playoff game. De Armas, a First Team All-Orange Empire Conference selection, led the Hawks with 15.1 points per game as SCC finished the 2024-25 season 21-9 and advanced to the 3C2A Southern Regional Final.



PHOTO COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS

Students celebrate during the 2025 commencement ceremony at Santiago Canyon College. The college awarded 4,045 degrees, certificates and diplomas during the 2024-25 academic year, an increase from 3,867 the previous year, reflecting continued growth in student success, transfer preparation and workforce training programs.

**GROWTH**

## College's student achievement keeps rising in 2024-2025

*RSCCD Communications*

Santiago Canyon College awarded 4,045 degrees, certificates and diplomas in 2024-2025, up from 3,867 the previous year, an increase that reflects the college's strong focus on student success, transfer preparation and workforce training.

One of the most significant areas of growth was in noncredit Career Development and College Preparation certificates, which rose 129%, increasing from 452 to 1,033 awards. This expansion underscores SCC's role as a gateway for adult learners, working professionals, and community members seeking skills that lead to economic mobility, career advancement, and personal fulfillment.

Associate degrees for transfer remained steady at 598, supporting seamless transitions to California State University and University of California campuses. The college also awarded 1,239 associate degrees, 1,072 credit certificates, and 103 adult high school diplomas.

The college also saw continued momentum in four-year university transfer, with 1,434 students transferring in 2024-2025, up from 1,376 the previous year. Growth was particularly notable among transfers to private and out-of-state institutions, while CSU and UC transfer numbers remained steady, signaling broad student aspirations and preparation.

Total enrollment reached over 21,500 credit students in Fall 2024, up from 20,038 the previous year. Credit headcount rose to 11,824 in Fall 2024 and 12,215 in Spring 2025. SCC continues to be one of the most affordable colleges in California, with a resident per-unit cost of \$46, ensuring that cost is not a barrier to opportunity. The college's Hispanic/Latinx enrollment increased from 56.1% to 74.3%, strengthening its identity and impact as a Hispanic-Serving Institution committed to equity, representation, and culturally responsive education.

The college employs more than 1,200 faculty and staff, with 54% of instruction delivered by full-time faculty, ensuring quality and continuity across academic programs.

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