

We



City College
Mesa College
Miramar College
College of Continuing Education

Welcome Chancellor Smith

Story on page 08

CHANCELLOR'S MESSAGE



CORE COMMITMENTS

Becoming chancellor of the San Diego Community College District on February 1 is a full-circle moment for me. As a first-generation college student myself, I know firsthand the positive transformation community colleges have on families and their communities, and I am immensely grateful to serve in this position.



As acting chancellor, Gregory Smith took part in the inaugural raising of the Progress Pride flag outside the District Office.

I first came to San Diego in 2020 as vice chancellor of Human Resources (now People, Culture, and Technology Services) for the District, and arrived with a desire to put my training, experience, and creativity to work contributing to a culture that values and prioritizes diversity, ensures higher education is accessible and inclusive, and uplifts our local communities. I never imagined my efforts would lead to me being called to serve as acting chancellor or given the opportunity to be selected as the District's chancellor.

I believe every position in a public agency is essential to the mission and deserves a professional dedicated to doing great work. My career in public service continues to be guided by a philosophy engrained in me by one of my mentors: to seek out the highest level of positive impact I can offer our community. And, in order to be the best public servant I am capable of, I am motivated by the scope,

responsibility, and broad impact of the chancellor position.


Serving as chancellor for a district with 5,000 employees and nearly 80,000 students attending annually, my efforts can impact hundreds of thousands of community members each year.

To that end, my service to the SDCCD is framed by five core commitments:

1. I will be an expert in the essential functions of my position, and I will be proactive in mastering new knowledge and skills wherever necessary to best serve the District.
2. I will value the lives, experiences, and perspectives of each member of our community as much as I value my own.
3. I will make the right decision for our students, employees, and District no matter how hard that decision may be, and no matter how much it may cost me personally.
4. My work will be framed by an intrinsic respect and love for the humanity of every member of our community.
5. I welcome every member of our community to hold me accountable for meeting my commitments.

In order to meet these commitments, together we need to be clear about valuing the intersecting identities of our students and communities; we need to understand the lived experiences which shape how students and communities interact with us; and we must proactively align instruction, services, and operations to ensure the access, belonging, and success for those traditionally excluded and underserved in public higher education. Together we can uplift each other, our students, and our local communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to join you in this incredible work!


Chancellor Gregory Smith

08

Relentless Optimism

Gregory Smith Assumes His Role as Chancellor with a Clear Commitment to Equity and Opportunity for Students and Employees



14

Building Classrooms of the Future

November bond measure would upgrade, modernize, and repair District facilities



16

Growth Opportunity

SDCCD programs help entrepreneurs launch and cultivate their businesses



20

Building Confidence

Thousands of students utilize SDCCD tutoring services to help them connect the dots to academic success



WHAT'S INSIDE

CONNECTIONS

- 4 More Than a Grain of Creativity
- 5 City College Dedicates Building to Chancellor Emerita Carroll
Students Continue to Struggle with Basic Needs
- 6 Pilot Program Takes Off Aboard the USS Midway
- 7 SDCCD Joins Together at MLK Parade
Historic Rains Galvanize a Community

CAMPUS NEWS

- 22 City College
- 23 Mesa College
- 24 Miramar College
- 25 College of Continuing Education

SDCCD NEWSMAKERS

- 26 Creating Meaningful Changes

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

If you have an exciting story to share, know of a student or colleague who is doing noteworthy work, or think there's a program that deserves a mention, please send ideas to cpr@sdccd.edu for consideration in an upcoming WE magazine.

MORE THAN A GRAIN OF CREATIVITY



Since 1991, Daniel Gutowski (pictured with a hat) has been creating large-scale sand sculptures in competitions and for special events, including the 2012 grand opening of the Library and Learning Resource Center and Veteran's Day at Miramar College.

In case you're wondering what an internet pirate, a Foster Farms chicken, Tonka trucks, and a stack of books outside a newly opened library have in common, it's Daniel Gutowski.

Since 1991, Gutowski, the Miramar College Facilities and Operations director, has been meticulously sculpting—ton by ton and grain by grain—such imaginative, often whimsy, and award-winning sand sculptures all over the country.

"It's a great creative outlet," said Gutowski, who has worked for the San Diego Community College District since 2000 in various positions from swimming pool supervisor to park coordinator and various interim positions. "It's something that adds to your thought process since you have to think three-dimensionally. It's also an art that often requires physical endurance."

He and a team of friends who go by "The Sand Squirrels" have participated on the centerstage of the U.S. Open Sandcastle Competition and for TV shows like "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition" and the Travel Channel's "Sand Blasters," in addition to creating works of art for wedding proposals, in Las Vegas hotel lobbies, and for grand openings like the 2012 Library and Learning Resource Center at Miramar College.

The creations he works on often start as a 20-ton pile of sand—quarry sand is ideal, according to Gutowski—and end in extremely detailed masterpieces that can eclipse 15-foot-tall. The earlier mentioned pirate was a reference

to a delicately carved entry that depicted computer screens and pirates with eye patches, officially dubbed "Pirates of the Internet," which the Sand Squirrels created in a nod to the Napster music piracy era. The entry captured first place during the 2003 U.S. Open Sandcastle Competition held in Imperial Beach in front of a crowd of some 200,000 people in addition to being debuted on CNN Worldwide and mentioned in *The New York Times*. The \$5,000 prize money earned, like many of the team's winnings, was donated to youth programs.

One wouldn't immediately connect the dots between the skills honed in the practice of sand sculpting and those necessary for a management position as a facilities and operations director, but Gutowski thinks otherwise.

"Having a great physical and creative outlet just allows you to do more," he said. "You're willing to take more risk, you're able to function at a higher capacity. My roles as a sculptor and in a professional capacity are complementary."

In addition to his sculpting pastime, it's also worth noting that Gutowski took a turn as a Miramar College water polo player. Having competed on the inaugural Miramar College water polo team in 2000, a remaining year of eligibility allowed him to return to the pool as a Jet in 2021.

If you're ever in a Zoom meeting with Gutowski when his camera is off, you'll find a sand sculpture in place of his face—it is in his identity, after all. "If someone told me to go pack sand, I'd take it as a compliment."

City College Dedicates Building to CHANCELLOR EMERITA CONSTANCE M. CARROLL

San Diego City College hosted a building dedication and San Diego Promise fundraiser on January 25 to pay tribute to the legacy of Chancellor Emerita Constance M. Carroll, who served the SDCCD as chancellor from 2004-2021.

The day was highlighted with the presentation of a new sign on the east side of the AH Building — facing 16th Street at the corner of C Street — denoting “The Constance M. Carroll Arts & Humanities Building”. Additional signage,

including wall wraps and wayfinding signs, throughout the building’s interior also was revealed. The artwork, which was created by graphic design students Katherine Heath and Alfiia Osipova, takes

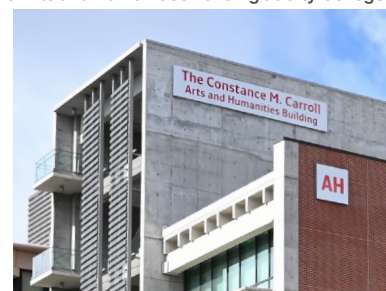
visitors on a journey through Dr. Carroll’s storied career, including her national leadership in the tuition-free Promise movement and co-chair of the advocacy campaign to help establish the California

Community College Baccalaureate Program.

The two students, along with Honors and Promise student Nasteho Ali who spoke during the event, each were awarded a \$1,000 scholarship.



Chancellor Emerita Constance M. Carroll, fourth from right, was honored with her name on the east side of the Arts and Humanities Building at City College.



Students Continue to Struggle with Basic Needs

A recent Real College Survey showed that a large number of students in the San Diego Community College District continue to struggle with having enough food and a safe place to live. The survey, which is the largest annual assessment of basic needs security among California community college students, received responses from about 66,000 students at 88 community colleges statewide. More

than 5,600 students from the SDCCD responded.

Well aware of the challenges that students face, SDCCD colleges — San Diego City College, San Diego Mesa College, San Diego Miramar College and San Diego College of Continuing Education — offer a wide variety of resources and help for students who are struggling to obtain adequate food or housing or who are unhoused.

Of those San Diego students who responded to the survey:



PILOT PROGRAM TAKES OFF ABOARD THE USS MIDWAY

At the end of 2023, students from the San Diego College of Continuing Education welding program climbed aboard the USS Midway to gain real-world experience restoring the floating museum in downtown San Diego's Embarcadero district. Student welders from SDCCE got to fabricate new pedestrian guard rails and gates encompassing the Midway's 4-acre flight deck and assist with various repair and preservation projects while aboard — a unique position to gain a trade skills apprenticeship while in college. SDCCE students selected for the pilot program, including Jasmin Hernandez, 19, Mark Silva, 23, Ariana Espinoza, 23, and Liam McGeath, 24, were enrolled in advanced Shielding Metal Arc Welding or Gas Metal and Flux Cored Arc Welding courses, with each showing exemplary progress, professionalism, and course attendance. SDCCE and the Midway have plans to expand the partnership in 2024 to students enrolled in the college's HVAC and plumbing certificate programs.



SDCCD Joins Together for MLK PARADE

Some 300 San Diego Community College District participants turned out to celebrate the legacy of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., during the 42nd annual parade along the San Diego Embarcadero. The District's float representing San Diego City, Mesa, and Miramar colleges touted "A Diverse Community is a Healthy Community" and displayed various photos of students, faculty, classified employees, and administrators alongside a recreation of the Martin Luther King, Jr., Memorial statue in Washington, D.C., and the float for San Diego College of Continuing Education honored former artist in resident Rossie Wade.



HISTORIC RAINS GALVANIZE A COMMUNITY

Heavy rains in January and February brought flooding throughout San Diego County and left many local communities reeling in the aftermath. Answering calls-to-action from various organizations, including the Jackie Robinson Family YMCA and the Harvey Family

Foundation, the San Diego Community College District stepped up to lend a hand to neighbors in hard-hit Southeast San Diego.

Close to 30 people representing San Diego City, Mesa, Miramar, and Continuing Education colleges, as well as

District Office personnel, showed up in work clothes on January 27 to help clear water-damaged debris from homes and shovel excess mud from flooded embankments and streets in preparation for the City of San Diego to haul items away.

"We're just trying to do

our small part for a community devastated in San Diego," said City College President Ricky Shabazz, who helped with the efforts. "The first word in community college is 'community' and I got to see that when we handed out breakfast and when we brought together a group of volunteers

to lend a hand."

The SDCCD did not escape the record-breaking rains unscathed. Damage consisting of major flooding of classrooms, hallways, and parking structures along with damage to walls and other infrastructure impacted all 10 campuses.







Relentless Optimism

Gregory Smith Assumes His Role as Chancellor with a Clear Commitment to Equity and Opportunity for Students and Employees

At the start of the millennium, Gregory Smith was a college student looking for work, barely making ends meet, living in Phoenix and driving a busted car with no air conditioning. That's when he learned about an opening for a position as a compliance officer with the U.S. Department of Labor enforcing equal employment opportunity and affirmative action regulations. He jumped at the opportunity.

His role with the federal office would be the launching point for a career dedicated to safeguarding the rights of the most vulnerable. It also set him on a pathway that would lead him to being named the San Diego Community College District's seventh chancellor in its 50-year history.

After serving as acting chancellor since March 2023, Smith's first official day in his new position began February 1, and his focus is clear.

"My vision is creating an environment where everybody who comes here feels they can be who they are authentically, an environment where students know and feel they belong, a district that's invested in them, that supports them as they become the person they want to be," he said.

Chancellor Smith's career path has been guided by an unshakeable belief in equity. He credits his sixth-grade teacher, Mrs. Brown, a Black woman who encouraged him to see the world through multiple perspectives, with sparking his interest in equity. "I just want you to understand that not everyone experiences the world the way you do," Smith recalls her telling him near the end of the school year. It is this foundational principle that Smith will use as a guide as he leads 5,000 employees and the nearly 80,000 students they serve at the SDCCD.

Smith grew up in the rural Southern California

Chancellor Gregory Smith wants to create an environment at the District that allows people to be who they are authentically and feel they belong.

communities of Trona and Ridgecrest. When it came time for the son of working class parents and grandson of a foster child to enroll in college, he turned to Cerro Coso Community College as the only affordable option, while his peers, whose parents had Ph.D.s and master's degrees, went off to study at the likes of Yale, University of California, Berkeley, and University of California, Los Angeles.

“My parents could not go to college, my grandparents could not go to college, so it was really important to them that I go, because their prospects were really limited,” he said.

It would be his start at a community college that became the foundation of his career in public service initially as a compliance officer with the U.S. Department of Labor enforcing equal employment opportunity and affirmative action regulations, then moving on to Shasta College in Northern California where he took on roles as director of Human Resources, associate vice president of Human Resources, and interim vice president of Administrative Services before making his way to San Diego when he was hired in 2020 as vice chancellor of People, Culture, and Technology Services at the SDCCD.

Now, as chancellor, Smith is responsible for a \$1 billion annual budget and all operations for a system that stands as the largest provider of workforce training and higher education in the region. The District and its four colleges — San Diego City, Mesa, Miramar, and Continuing Education —



Chancellor Smith walks through the heart of Hillcrest during the 2023 Pride Parade where he was joined by hundreds of students, faculty, classified employees, and SDCCD community members.



Chancellor Smith, far right, joins in celebration of the graduates of the Supervisory Leadership Development Academy.



Chancellor Smith joined the student trustees and ASG representatives during the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. parade in downtown San Diego.

have an annual economic impact of \$4.5 billion. Enrollment is growing and, thanks to the governing board's careful stewardship, the District's fiscal health remains solid.

But challenges remain. Many students are still struggling as a result of the pandemic, which required some to put their education on hold. The state, which funds most District operations, is facing a budget deficit estimated by the Legislative Analyst's Office at \$73 billion in 2024-25, with multi-billion-dollar deficits projected for following years. The District, in need of significant upgrades to support the latest innovations in technology, as well as much needed facilities upgrades and repairs, is preparing to place its first bond program on the ballot since 2006. Additionally, Chancellor Smith takes over on a permanent basis at a time when the U.S. Supreme Court is taking a more hostile attitude toward diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) and affirmative action in

hiring practices.

He remains undeterred. Smith likes to tell people: "Relentless optimism is my superpower."

Those who know him say Smith is more than ready for whatever comes his way.

"One of the things that really strikes me is how skilled he is in understanding how data affects solid decision-making," said SDCCD Board of Trustees President Bernie Rhinerson. "It's also quite remark-

"I will advocate for the best interests of our students."

— Chancellor Gregory Smith



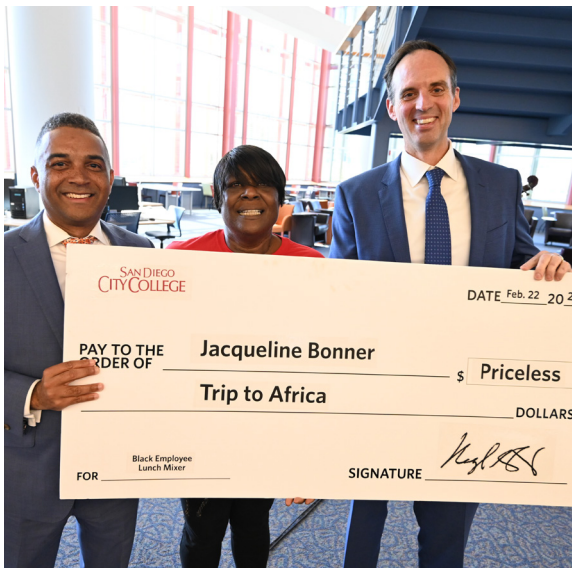
able how he has detailed data at his fingertips. He has exhibited the highest standards of insight and innovation in the work that he does. He is a true leader.”

In addition to his start at Cerro Coso Community College, Smith earned bachelor’s degrees in English literature and political science from Arizona State University — graduating summa cum laude — and a master’s degree in public administration at University of Southern California.

“Leadership is about building trust in others and with others,” Rhinerson said, “and Greg excels at building trust and building relations. There is no doubt in my mind he will be an excellent chancellor.”

Indeed, Smith’s impact was being felt when he was still acting chancellor. He was a driving force in the District’s decision to boost the minimum wage for all permanent employees to \$30.58 per hour (\$63,606 annually) beginning January 1, 2024, and wages for temporary employees to \$23.21 per hour (\$46,404 annually). With an official ground-breaking ceremony last October, plans to build affordable, on-campus housing at San Diego City College remained on track for students who might otherwise be couch surfing or living on the street.

“I will advocate for the best interests of our students,” Smith said. “That includes our students who are recent immigrants, who are undocumented, our students who are LGBTQIA+, and our students who are from a variety of historically minoritized cultures. I’m here to advocate that every single member of our community has that same access I had.” **we**



Chancellor Smith helps City College President Ricky Shabazz award longtime facilities classified employee Jacqueline Bonner with a scholarship to attend the 2024 All Africa Diaspora Summit in Ghana with other District representatives.



ON A PERSONAL NOTE...

What is something people would be surprised to know about you?

My first career aspiration was to be the starting shortstop for the Oakland A's, my second was to be an actor/filmmaker. On a whim, I enrolled in a theater class while I was at Cerro Coso. I did several plays including *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *You Can't Take It with You*, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, *Twelfth Night*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, among others. I enjoyed playing baseball and acting more than people enjoyed watching me play or act, so I had to find other career aspirations.

When you're not at work, what are you doing?

I have a 2-year-old daughter so I'm at the park, at the beach, at the zoo, having tea parties, demonstrating my mastery of the alphabet, explaining why we don't climb on coffee tables, and fondly recalling the days when I could sleep through the night. I used to read quite a bit, but the demands of life leave little time so I've finally embraced audiobooks. My wife and I enjoy cooking and are semi-professional foodies, so we love getting out and trying new and eclectic restaurants when we have a chance.



Chancellor Smith believes that students will find life-changing experiences when they engage with and invest in their SDCCD communities.

If you could have lunch with anyone, who would it be and why?

As life progresses, our priorities change, and my answers are more personal and pragmatic now than when I was younger. Lunches with my wife and daughter mean the world to me and I cherish those moments. I wish I could have lunch with my grandma or dad, who I miss dearly. I think of friends I haven't seen recently and opportunities to sit and reconnect over a meal.

What drew your interest to English during your undergraduate studies?

I was drawn to language and storytelling from a very early age. I remember feeling books were almost magical, able to create people, places, and events through my imagination. I would ask my mom to read me books over and over again, to the point I memorized the words before I could even read them. She likes to tell the stories of me at 2 years old sitting and reciting the words in a book, turning the pages at the correct moment, and other adults thinking I could actually read.

Over the course of my childhood, I increasingly recognized the power of words and language to shape how we understand the world and each other. I had no idea what I would do professionally with an undergraduate degree in English literature, so, it was purely an academic interest at that point in my life.

I didn't fully appreciate the value of my English studies until early in my professional career. Years of reading, studying, contemplating, and writing about literature provided me with a strong foundation of communica-

tion skills which I believe are the primary source of my professional success and are skills essential to every career path.

What advice do you have for students walking into an SDCCD classroom for the first time?

Engage! You are capable of extraordinary accomplishments when you show up and engage. Build relationships with your peers, your faculty, and the professionals serving you the various offices you enter. Invest in being part of our community and you will have incredible, life-changing experiences in higher education.

What is the legacy you to hope to leave behind in this world?

The legacy I wish to leave is one of hope. I try to be relentlessly optimistic in every aspect of my life. Tomorrow always has the possibility of being better than today, if we can only envision it and work towards it.

Professionally, I hope my work will have strengthened the foundation of the organizations I served such that they create more public value and better serve the full diversity of their communities well beyond my years of service.

Personally, my legacy will be the relationships I have built over the course of my life. I hope the majority of people will feel I impacted their life positively in some unique way. The defining feature of the most impactful relationships in my life is the gratitude I feel from knowing and interacting with another person. I hope my actions will leave the majority of people I have known feeling grateful for the time we had together.



BUILDING CLASSROOMS OF THE FUTURE

November bond measure would upgrade, modernize, and repair District facilities

For more than a century, each of the colleges within the San Diego Community College District — San Diego City, Mesa, Miramar, and Continuing Education — has been the foundation for building a better future for the region. To keep up with an ever-evolving technological landscape, one that requires precise skills to prepare students to enter the modern workforce, the SDCCD Board of Trustees is considering putting forth a measure on the November 2024 ballot to make sure its colleges continue to be able to support the success of our students.

Over the past 18 years, since voters approved the SDCCD's most recent bond, there have been major changes in how students are educated. The need for new technology and hands-on training spaces that are relevant to today's job market and the burgeoning careers of tomorrow are critically important.

What do classrooms of tomorrow look like compared to what exists today? Does AI play a role in the future of classrooms? These are questions the District's colleges considered as they developed plans for serving students for decades to come. What has emerged is a vision that includes new learning spaces, labs, and community-serving facilities — in many cases replacing antiquated facilities that are up to 50 years old.

As San Diego's leading provider of workforce education — including training for first responders, nurses, emergency medical technicians, and for careers in biotechnology, cyber defense, and sustainability — the San Diego community and local economy depend on the SDCCD to provide

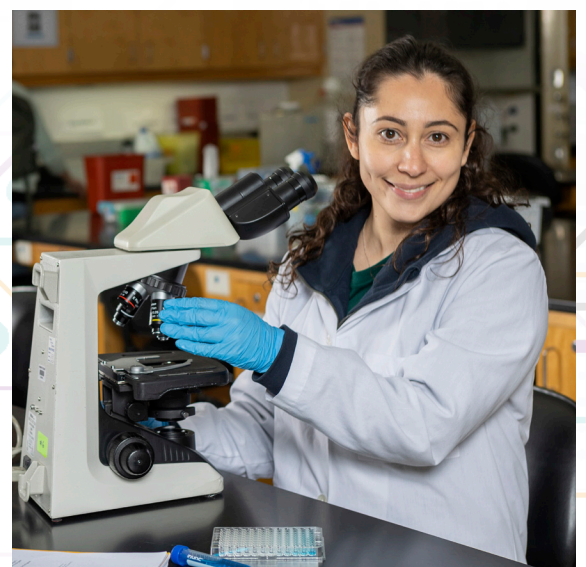
cutting-edge facilities and programs that respond to changing industry needs. Currently the SDCCD has a total economic impact on the region of \$4.5 billion — the equivalent of hosting 13 Super Bowls.

“Especially now, with the SDCCD offering bachelor's degrees in health information management, cyber defense and security, and soon in public safety management, it's important that we are teaching students in updated facilities that keep up with the modern workforce,” SDCCD Chancellor Gregory Smith said.

In addition to modernized classroom facilities, the SDCCD also recognizes the need for creating new affordable student housing to help address San Diego's housing shortage; creating new childcare facilities for student families; and for increasing the use of solar/renewable energy to reduce energy costs and benefit the environment.

The District has consistently maintained high ratings from Standard and Poor's, Moody's, and Fitch rating agencies for its management of existing bonded indebtedness. Through the Propositions S and N Citizens' Oversight Committee, the District has worked to ensure transparency and accountability and to be good stewards of taxpayer funds through bond refinancing that saved taxpayers \$340 million over the life of the most recent bond programs.

As the SDCCD Board of Trustees considers placing a bond measure on the November ballot, it will weigh the considerable need across the District and significant benefits to the region. The District encourages its friends and neighbors to learn more at sdccd.edu/Bond2024. **WE**



The SDCCD is the leading provider of local workforce education, including for first responders, nurses, and in biotechnology, and making sure its colleges are up to date with cutting-edge technology and facilities is vital to the community.



After earning a pair of business certificates from College of Continuing Education, Natasha Gottlieb, here with her cat Jasmine, launched a cat sitting business called Tabby Manor.

Growth Opportunity

SDCCD programs help entrepreneurs launch and cultivate their businesses

Whether it's learning how to launch a business or grow an existing small business, the San Diego Community College District has it covered. Across the District's four colleges — San Diego City, Mesa, Miramar and Continuing Education — students have found programs that support their entrepreneurial dreams and small businesses, while also helping to boost the local economy.

According to Lightcast, a leading provider of economic and labor market data, SDCCD alumni generate \$3.8 billion in added income to the local economy, which is equivalent to supporting 35,667 jobs during fiscal year 2022-23. Overall, the District added \$4.5 billion in economic income to the San Diego County region in fiscal year 2022-23, a number which could not be accomplished without the new and growing businesses in the area that found their footing through no- to low-cost programs offered throughout the SDCCD.

Here's a glance at the programs that support entrepreneurs and small businesses around San Diego and the students and alumni who are thriving because of the knowledge and support they gained through the SDCCD.

Gaining the 'know-how' at Mesa College

Mesa College offers several business programs to students, including the Small Business Virtual Incubator where students can earn a certificate. The 16-week program works with cohorts of 12 to 15 students who have the opportunity to receive personalized business coaching.

Professor Eduardo Landeros said the program caters to students who are interested in starting a business or who would like to expand an existing business but need more resources and advice.

"The Small Business Virtual Incubator was created to help students execute their business plan by providing

"Students are mostly grateful for the 'know-how' and the financial assistance we provide."

— Mesa College Professor
Eduardo Landeros


guidance from industry experts," Landeros said. "The SBVI also provides economic support to help students cover minor business expenses, such as inventory, small equipment, supplies, licenses and permits, software, etc, that they may need to get started."

For example, Landeros said one former student had years of experience working in the food industry but didn't know how to start her own business. Through the program, she learned how to design an effective marketing and advertising plan, while also receiving stipends to pay for equipment. Today, she has a catering business that specializes in outdoor fine dining.

"Students are mostly grateful for the 'know-how' and the financial assistance we provide," Landeros said. "Learning from industry experts or current business owners who are already doing what they want to do is priceless."

With a bachelor's degree in neurobiology already in hand, Sarah Uran turned to the Mesa College Small Business Virtual Incubator to help her launch her own medical communications company. After finishing the program in December, Uran continues to work on the small details of her company, Trusscare, which will specialize in resources and education to empower patients with effective communication skills to ultimately lead them to better medical care, ahead of a full launch later this year.

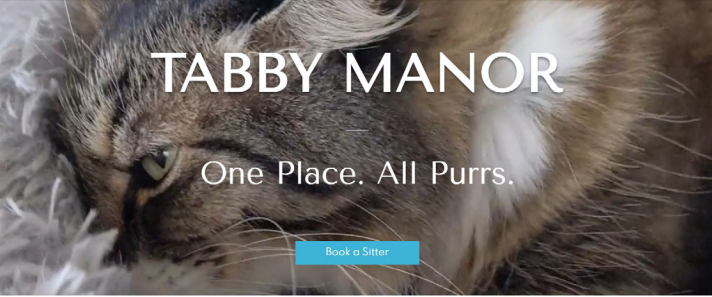
"One of the most valuable lessons I gained from the Small Business Virtual Incubator was learning how to believe in myself and my entrepreneurial vision," Uran said. "The program fostered a supportive environment that encouraged me to trust my instincts and take calculated risks. I highly recommend taking advantage of this transformative experience."



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Anh Pham, below, joined the REC Innovation Lab to help him launch Earth Fan Surf, where he shapes and sells eco-friendly wooden surf craft to cut down on the discarded polystyrene foam body boards and other harmful waste he has observed at area beaches.

A lab of opportunities at Miramar College

At 50 years old, surfer Anh Pham had a vision of delivering eco-friendly wooden surf craft to the market. With a passion for surfing and protecting the environment, the Vietnam War refugee said he learned how to shape wooden surfboards, but didn't know how to turn his passion into a business until he joined the Regional Entrepreneurship Center Innovation Lab, which had its official grand opening in January at its permanent space at Miramar College.

The REC Lab is a startup incuba-

tor program that connects budding entrepreneurial students with local mentors. With a particular focus on supporting diverse business owners, the program offers workshops, coaching, and access to printers and a variety of technology.

"There was a huge world of business that I didn't know about until I joined the REC Lab," Pham said. "This organization opened so many doors for a 50-year-old first-time college student."

Since joining the REC Lab, Pham learned how to build brand recognition and produce more boards,

which are modeled on ancient surf crafts of Paepo'o and Itago-nori, to sell. He said his company, Earth Fan Surf, is now ready to receive its first round of investments and launch sometime in 2024.

Tanya Hertz, director of the REC Lab, said the organization fills a gap in the market.

"We're an incubator and accelerator that isn't charging an arm and a leg to help grow your business," Hertz said. "We cater to regular people who want help to successfully grow their companies."

Hertz said the REC Lab has connected hundreds of people in the local business industry and helped launch more than 200 businesses, ranging from food to technology to childcare.

Jennifer Barnes, the CEO and founder of Optima Office, has been a mentor at the REC Innovation Lab for three years. From presentations to personal business advice to reviewing business plans, Barnes said all her experiences have been positive.

"It's an amazing program," Barnes said. "If I can help entrepreneurs live the lives they want to live, a life that is good for them and the economy — I consider it a win."



“It’s an amazing program.”

— Jennifer Barnes,
REC Lab Mentor and CEO and
founder of Optima Office

Ongoing growth at San Diego College of Continuing Education

At San Diego College of Continuing Education, students will find business programs that can be completed in just one semester, including planning and growth courses where students can earn certificates.

“Our program empowers students with invaluable practical business knowledge, equipping them with the essential skills necessary to navigate real-world challenges such as understanding the required permits and licenses for establishing a business,” Professor Matthew Rivaldi said. “Guided by friendly, experienced professors, our students develop a plan to not only launch, but also sustain a profitable business.”

Natasha Gottlieb earned her Small Business Planning Certificate and Small Business Growth Certificate in fall 2020, which helped her turn her side-gig of cat sitting into a full-fledged business. A few months later, Tabby Manor began accepting clients. Since that exciting launch, Tabby Manor’s sales have grown at an annual rate of 67% from 2021 to 2023 with nearly \$200,000 in revenue in 2023.

“Beyond the information on how to start a business, the Small Business Program really focused on how to make that business successful,” Gottlieb said. “Because of the Small Business Program, I have a well-thought out business model with a clear vision of business goals and what is needed in order to meet them.”

Gottlieb leans on her background in the veterinary field to offer clients more than just a cat companion – she’s also trained to administer medications and injections. Tabby Manor now has 13 cat sitters that offer a variety of services throughout 36 ZIP code areas around San Diego County.

Also available at SDCCE is the Clothing and Textiles Sewn Products Program where students can earn a certificate while also learning entrepreneurial skills. Students learn how to cut, sew, ideate new products, and conduct market research.

“I believe the key to our students creating and/or advancing their businesses lies in our program’s mission for sustainability, insisting on finding niche markets, providing industry interactions, and the access to digital technologies we provide,” Program Chair Shirley

Pierson said. “It is a holistic approach that transforms many of their lives.”

Transformation is a word alumnus Darius Stokes would use. He’s the founder of luxury clothing company, Dluxeware. A former foster youth with a dream of becoming a designer, Stokes took the SDCCE programs and learned how to construct garments that are inclusive of all gender identities and body types. He’s also learning how to start a production company.

“One of the best lessons I learned was how to break down large projects into smaller portions to complete the project in a time efficient manner,” Stokes said. “The professors have helped me tremendously.”

Managing a business for beginners at City College

Regardless of the type of business students want to launch — City College helps make the dream attainable. The second largest college within SDCCD has a long history of business-focused offerings, including an associate degree and certificate of achievement in Business Management.

The program offers students courses on how to start a business, operate a business, or work in a small business — creating the stepping stones needed for hopeful entrepreneurs to succeed.

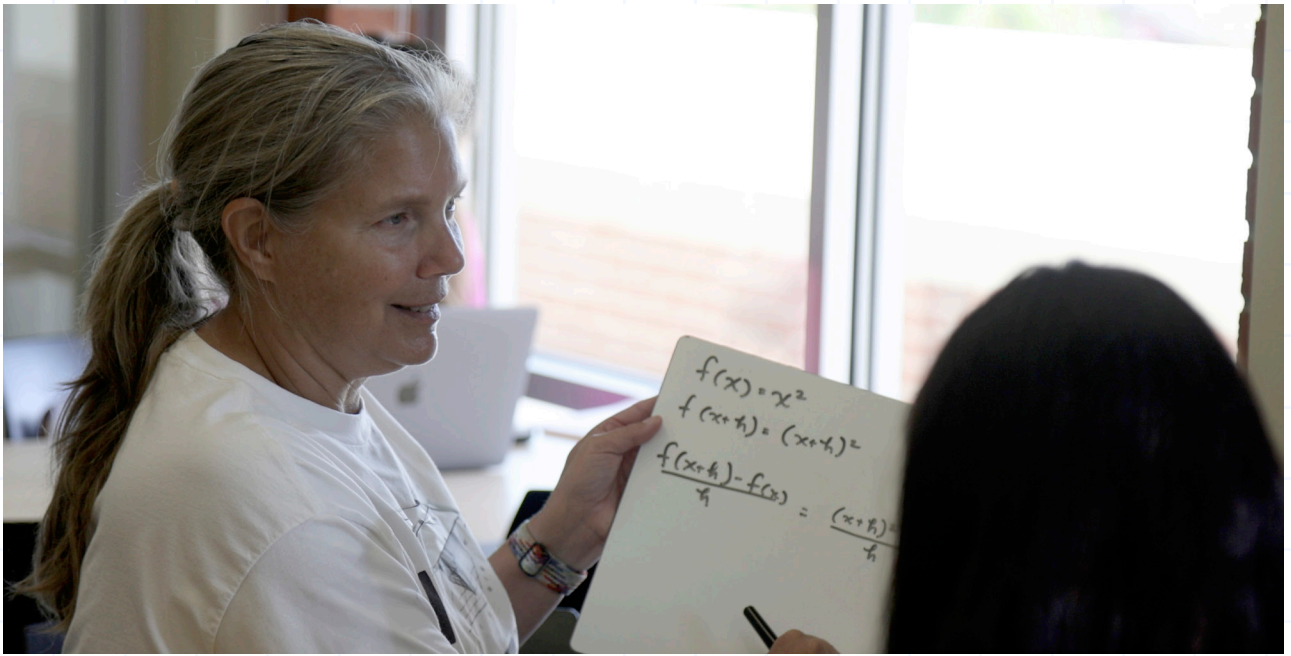
City College offers other affordable certificate programs including Starting and Managing a Small Business for students currently operating a small business who want to strengthen their business skills, and Working Education, which allows students to gain experience working in businesses on campus.

Professor Tania Mustafa said the Business Department’s offerings have undergone significant transformations to prioritize the needs of a diverse student population and the evolving needs of the business industry. For example, the department recently secured a grant to provide free textbooks to students who may need financial support.

“These initiatives highlight the department’s commitment to student success and academic excellence — ensuring access to resources and opportunities for personal and professional growth,” Mustafa said. **we**

Darius Stokes made his dream of becoming a fashion designer a reality after learning business and sewing skills through the Clothing and Textiles Sewn Products Program at SDCCE.





Becky Wheelock, who works in the City College Math Center, says that collaboration and the "figuring it out" process is one of the greatest aspects of math she can share with students.

BUILDING CONFIDENCE

Thousands of students utilize SDCCD tutoring services to help them connect the dots to academic success

“Students are mostly grateful for the ‘know-how’ and the financial assistance we provide.”

— Mark Manasse, coordinator of the tutoring program at Mesa College

Students often need extra help to succeed in their classes at San Diego Community College District colleges. Tutoring – whether it’s in-person or online – provides the free guidance students need to learn and master a subject. The District’s three credit colleges – San Diego City College, San Diego Mesa College and San Diego Miramar College – provide a wide scope of tutoring services, including in-person, one-on-one sessions as either drop-in or by appointment and online through services for their students. Additionally, tutors at each college are embedded within certain classrooms, where they attend class and then hold a tutoring session after class ends, including, among others, in English, math, biology, accounting, and language courses.

The San Diego College of Continuing Education, is in the process of setting up a tutoring center scheduled to open in fall 2024.

“Tutoring helps support students and individualizes education to support student development,” said Mark Manasse, coor-

dinator of the tutoring program at Mesa College.

The Mesa Tutoring and Computing Centers (MT2C) have about 80 tutors who provided almost 6,400 tutoring sessions to more than 1,350 students in fall 2023, nearly doubling totals from the previous fall. Tutoring sessions are available at the college’s Learning Resource Center, as well as at various hot spots across the campus.

Sometimes a student who comes for tutoring could also be dealing with circumstances outside the classroom, such as homelessness or food insecurity, that affects their ability to concentrate in class. Tutors also can assist those students, Manasse said.

“Our tutors are well-versed in our campus resources,” he said. “We can help students find the resources that they need to help them succeed.”

At City College, there is a long-standing commitment to tutoring through the Tutorial/Learning Center, Math Center, and English Center, all located in the L- Building/Academic Success Center. The three centers work together to provide thousands of sessions each semester to students across



Miramar College offers students four unique tutoring spaces around campus, including the STEM Center located in S6 110 near where many science classes are held and where tutor Samdrea Hsu (pictured above left) assists students.

“Tutoring helped me feel more connected to the campus.”

— Xenia LaFave,
City College student

the curriculum through peer tutoring, workshops, and supplemental instruction/embedded tutoring, as well as access to study spaces and computers.

Becky Wheelock, an adjunct professor who started tutoring in high school and had taught math at City College for 22 years before transitioning to work in the Math Center last year, emphasizes the importance of engagement in the tutoring process.

“We want people to love math as much as we do, but we understand that’s not the way it works,” she said. “Tutors and staff at the Math Center are all happy to say when we don’t know something, and we like to model that for our students. It’s important for students to know that we don’t just know stuff, but we’re here to help them figure it out together. It’s that ‘figuring it out’ process of collaborating that is the joy of math.”

The goal of the leaders of the three centers at City College, including Wheelock, Lance Soukhaseum, and Chris Baron, is to collaborate closely with faculty to help foster independence and mastery of material, engage student learning, and improve student self-esteem.

“Tutoring helped me feel more connected to the campus,” said City College student Xenia LaFave, who utilized the English Center for tutoring before becoming a tutor herself. “It gave me a safe place to ask questions in a helpful environment. It helped me feel more confident in my classes.”

Donnie Tran, coordinator of the Academic Success Center at Miramar College, said most of their 35 to 40 tutors are students. Tutors gain as much as the students receiving tutoring, he said.

“In addition to knowing strategies on how to tutor, they are getting training in how to be equity-minded,” he said. “They become aware of themselves, and they also approach situations in a culturally responsive way.”

Miramar offers in-person tutoring at four locations around campus, such as English, grammar, and writing support in the Arts and Humanities H-building where most writing-focused courses are held, so that a tutor is always nearby when a student needs one. Embedded tutors are provided in some math, English, and career education classes.

Tran said the role of Miramar College tutors, who served 703 students in spring 2023, is to guide students in a welcoming way so that they can understand the subject on their own.

“We don’t give them the answer,” he said. “We make them independent learners.”

At College of Continuing Education a new faculty coordinator is being hired for a tutoring center to be located at the Educational Cultural Complex campus, said Minou Spradley, interim vice president of instructional services. When the new center opens in the fall, students seeking tutoring will enroll in a class to get assistance.

“It’s important to the success of our students,” Spradley said of the student body where many report being refugees, asylum seekers, and naturalized citizens, and more than 50% are over the age of 50. “They need high touch. They need a safe space. They need a space where they are not judged and they are welcomed.” **WE**



SAN DIEGO CITY COLLEGE

GRADUATE EARNS OUTSTANDING ALUMNI AWARD

Former San Diego City College student Katya Echazarreta, who went on to work as an electrical engineer at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena and later became the first Mexican-born woman in space, has been honored as one of just three people selected by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) as a recipient of its 2024 Outstanding Alumni Award.

The AACC is the primary advocacy organization for the nation's community colleges. The association represents more than 1,000, two-year, associate degree-granting institutions and nearly 12 million students.

The honor is the latest for the City College alumna whose accomplishments include earning the prestigious Jack Kent Cooke Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship that enabled her to attend and graduate from UCLA and securing

a master's degree in electrical engineering at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. Echazarreta currently serves as president at Fundación Espacial Katya Echazarreta, a nonprofit she founded to encourage and prepare young people, women and children, as well as scientists and engineers in Mexico, to develop the knowledge and skills for carrying out advanced studies in the cosmos.

"At community college, many students see the pathway to their future clearly for the first time, and their lives are transformed," said AACC President and CEO Walter G. Bumphus. "This year, AACC will recognize three alumni who experienced that transformative power, and who, in turn, are now changing the lives of others. These outstanding alumni are truly deserving of the term 'outstanding.'"

Echazarreta is City College. She benefited from an array of cam-

pus organizations and programs, including First Year Services, a staff of dedicated counselors, Peer Mentor Services, and the college's MESA Program, an acronym for Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement.

Echazarreta wasn't even thinking about attending City College while acing her classes at Eastlake High School in Chula Vista. But a four-year degree program right out of high school was out of her family's budget. Then she learned about City College and made what she has called the best decision of her life.

"Everything I've accomplished is a direct result of City College and the San Diego Community College District," said the native of Guadalajara who moved with her family to Chula Vista when she was 7. "I would not be here today if it were not for the education and support I received at that campus."



City College alumna Katya Echazarreta, who in 2022 became the first Mexican-born woman in space, was honored as an outstanding alumni by the American Association of Community Colleges.



CELEBRATING 60 YEARS

of Equity and Excellence

San Diego Mesa College kicked off its 60th anniversary celebrations on January 31, with a formal program of speakers including Chancellor Gregory Smith and Board of Trustees President Bernie Rhinerson, along with Chancellor Emerita Constance M. Carroll and Mesa College Alumna Dr. Hellen Griffith of The Preuss School at UC San Diego. San Diego City Council President Sean Elo-Rivera and Councilmember Jennifer Campbell, along with Dion Atkins, representing Mayor Todd Gloria, provided proclamations declaring January 31 as “San Diego Mesa College Day.”

More than 250 guests enjoyed a dance performance, music, food, and festivities around the campus quad. Earlier in the morning, the San Diego Mesa College Foundation hosted the “Changemakers Breakfast” where foundation members and donors gathered to provide support for the nonprofit and Mesa College students. To view Mesa College’s celebratory 60th anniversary video, read about Mesa history via the interactive timeline, and to get a list of 60 books, songs, and places to visit on campus, visit sdmesa.edu/60thAnniversary.

Award distinguishes efforts of Library and LRC programs and initiatives

In February, the Mesa College Library and Learning Resource Center (LRC) received the 2024 Library Excellence in Access and Diversity (LEAD) Award from Insight Into Diversity magazine, the largest and oldest diversity and inclusion publication in higher education.



Mesa College kicked off its 60th anniversary celebrations at the start of the spring semester.

Insight Into Diversity magazine selected the Mesa College Library and LRC because of its commitment to promoting access, outreach, and literacy services to underserved groups, including ethnic and racial minorities, varying gender identities, and people with disabilities.

Board of Governors recognizes the Ethnic Studies Faculty Council

In January, the California Community Colleges Board of Governors declared the Mesa College Ethnic Studies Faculty Council (MC-ESFC), comprised of faculty

from multiple disciplines, as a model for how institutional stakeholders can work in collaboration to advance ethnic studies. For 2023-2024, the theme was “Excellence in Promotion and Advancement of Ethnic Studies.”

Out of the California Community College system’s sprawling 116 campuses serving more than 1.8 million students, the MC-ESFC was one of four honorees. The MC-ESFC began in fall 2020 as a taskforce charged with protecting and planning for

the future of ethnic studies. It now continues as a permanent body and “serves as a representative voice and resource for the establishment and evolution of Ethnic Studies departments and programs at Mesa College and the San Diego Community College District.”

The MC-ESFC is led by faculty discipline experts in the academic fields of ethnic studies, including Black studies, Chicana and Chicano studies, and Asian American and Pacific Islander studies.



Faculty from Mesa College’s Ethnic Studies program accept recognition from the Board of Governors.



SAN DIEGO MIRAMAR COLLEGE

THE AMAZIN' JETS!

Nineteen-sixty-nine was a memorable year in New York City baseball folklore. The New York Mets won a World Series Championship just a year removed from an 89-loss season. As a result of that dramatic turnaround, the hometown nine have come to be affectionately known as the “Amazin’ Mets.”

Six decades later, the 2023 version of the San Diego Miramar College women’s water polo team can call themselves the “Amazin’ Jets!” Theirs wasn’t a story of recovery from losing nearly half the total number of games in the season — only because the year prior there were no games to be played due to a canceled season — but rather one in which, following a program hiatus, the “Amazin’ Jets” returned to the pool to win the Pacific Coast Athletic Conference title for the first time in school history.

In the summer of 2022, with fewer than seven players on the roster — the total needed in the pool at any given time and necessary minimum required to compete — Athletic Director Nick Gehler made the difficult decision to cancel the season.

“I told the coach at the time that we needed to get at least seven players to participate,” Gehler said. “We fell short of that number and I had to make a difficult call.”

His next call wasn’t too difficult to make.

In December 2022, Head Coach Lucy Gates, 27, was hired away from Palomar College, where she had won the PCAC title during the 2022 season as interim head coach. It was now her job to find players and field a team in time for the start of the 2023 season. So, Gates searched San Diego County pools for players while also acting as the head coach of the Oceanside High School girls’ team.

“When I got the job, I had to hit the ground running with recruiting efforts,” Gates said. “Luckily, we had three returning players that stuck around after the canceled season, including our star goalie, Rylie Hage. So, I had at least those three to lean on during the process. I cast a wide net and talked to as many area seniors as I could. I tried to over recruit and it paid off.”

After each game Gates

coached at Oceanside High, she would seek permission from the opposing coaches to address the seniors on coming to Miramar College to continue their playing careers. A community college athlete herself, having played at Palomar College before transferring to California State University, Monterey Bay, Gates espoused the benefits of playing at a community college.

“Recruits had to buy into my vision for the Miramar program,” she said.

Gates then hired assistant coaches Bennett Bugelli and Evan Dean, who she claims “were essential factors in our team’s success,” and away they went.

Along the way, the coaching staff added the offensive prowess of Poway High School’s Nalani Galindo, who would lead the Jets in scoring. On the defensive side, Chloe Fairchild showed up from nearby Clairemont High School and stepped up as the team’s guard.

“I was so grateful that Rylie stuck around, finding a talented goalie for your program at this level isn’t easy,” said Gates. “Rylie and the other two returners had their season robbed from them the year prior, so I just wanted to give them a great experience.” And that she did — one that few could predict would come.

The 2023 season started September 8 with a five-game winning streak, which included the Jets’ first of two wins over San Diego Mesa College. By late October, the Jets were 16 and 3 and headed to their first ever PCAC title. The “Amazin’ Jets” wrapped up an undefeated regular

season conference record before going on to win the PCAC tournament championship and qualify for the SoCal Regionals.

The Jets were able to avenge an early season loss to Cuesta College during the first round of the SoCal Regionals in early November. That victory set up a quarterfinals date with the state’s top-seeded program Santa Barbara City College. The Jets trailed 7-5 before ultimately losing 14-6. Santa Barbara then went on to win the SoCal regional and qualify for the state championship tournament. The Jets returned to Miramar College with a desire to improve in 2024 and a whole lot of post-season accolades for their efforts.

In the end, several “Amazin’ Jets” earned post-season honors. First team All-PCAC selections included: Hage, Fairchild, Erica Pircher, and Emma Roberson. Second team All-PCAC selections included: Jordy Jordison and Emma Fritz. Gabby Atta was named honorable mention. Additionally, Galindo and Hage were named 1st Team All-Regional and All-American while Fairchild and Erica Pircher earned 2nd team All-Regional and All-American.

Head Coach Lucy Gates was honored as PCAC Coach of the Year while Galindo was named PCAC Player of the Year.

With every current player on the team classified as an athletic freshman and eligible to return for next season, plus with another strong recruiting class, there’s excitement ahead for the 2024 season.



The Miramar College women's water polo team won the 2023 PCAC league title.



INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNIZED PROFESSOR EXPANDS EMERITUS PIANO PROGRAM

The Emeritus program at San Diego College of Continuing Education offers seniors an opportunity for artistic exploration, including a popular piano course taught by Helena Wei, a professor of music and accomplished concert pianist.

A true passion for performing came later in life for Wei, an inspiration to anyone who has heard her play Chopin, Mozart, or Piazzolla. Even to the untrained ear, Wei is mesmerizing.

Wei was born in Taiwan and started playing the piano at the request of her mother at the age of 5. By the age of 9, she was accepted into the first gifted academy in Taiwan, specifically designed for young artists. By the time she turned 12, Wei received a scholarship to attend The Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto, one of the most esteemed music education institutions in the world— but her heart wasn't fully invested.

"I hated performing in front of people; the whole experience just devastated me," she said.

Despite those feelings, Wei's mother encouraged her to further her schooling in order to teach. It was while studying at the University of British Columbia that Wei finally felt her emotions connect with her music.

"I met a professor who deeply impacted me. He encouraged me to be vulnerable when I play, and to play for myself," she said.

Upon completion of her master's degree at UBC, Wei accepted a lecturer position at Tunghai University in Taiwan and later a post at the University of the Pacific in California.

Eventually, Wei and her family moved to San Diego. With a strong interest to continue educating students, in 2015 she found her way to SDCCE where she accepted a position to teach music



Helena Wei started teaching piano to 13 students in 2015 and has since grown the San Diego College of Continuing Education program to more than 400 students.

appreciation to Emeritus students, bringing with her a relentless optimism to one day build-up the college's piano department.

Wei's first piano class at SDCCE only had 13 students. Students from mixed levels were pooled into one class.

"I had to advocate for splitting up the levels to teach more effectively," she said.

In 2016, SDCCE's César Chávez Campus housed two sections of piano: beginners and experienced. In the years to come, Wei grew a loyal following with full retention. Her classes expanded to the Scripps Miramar Ranch Library, Serra Mesa-Kearny Mesa Library, and the Mira Mesa Senior Center by 2019.

An accomplishment to celebrate.

Currently, Wei serves as an assistant program chair of the Emeritus program and is a con-

tract faculty member overseeing more than 430 students through six levels of piano courses — from beginners to advanced — and two performance masterclasses.

Inside the classroom, Wei is pairing music with art. Her curriculum features master paintings to evoke musical expression.

"My students love it," she said. "I take them to an art museum and present a concert during each of our lessons."

A cornerstone of the Emeritus piano program is the emphasis on performance, with students of all levels showcasing their skills. Wei's curriculum provides her piano students countless opportunities to perform. Weekly outreaches are hosted at Nazareth House of San Diego, while monthly recitals are held at the Scripps Miramar Ranch Library and online through Zoom.

Additionally, all Emeritus students are invited to perform at the Emeritus Benefit Concert hosted once a year at Canyon Crest Academy. Proceeds from this concert benefit the Emeritus Program, which offers free classes for older adults in areas of music, health and wellness, art, and social studies.

"Once a mentor told me a good professor is someone who entertains. I love to entertain my students; it delights me to provide effortless learning through amusement and joy... funny how much I love to perform now," shared Wei, who has toured extensively throughout North America, Europe, and Asia as a soloist, chamber musician, and lecturer.

"It is now my deep passion to inspire my students in discovering the joy of music, just like I had the opportunity to experience so profoundly."



CREATING MEANINGFUL CHANGES

After being sworn in on January 25 as a student trustee representing San Diego Miramar College, Saigeldeep Ghotra embarked on back-to-back trips to Sacramento and Washington, D.C., to advocate on behalf of the San Diego Community College District. For Ghotra, who was raised in Merced, Calif., by parents who immigrated to California from India, public policy has always been in her plans.

“I grew up in low-income housing in an area that had no job opportunities for socioeconomic mobility. It’s my responsibility to pursue equitable change for increased support towards at-risk populations,” Ghotra said. “I hope whatever I do, I am a representation of my heritage.”

As a student trustee and Miramar College Associated Student Government (ASG) president, Ghotra, 19, focused her efforts on those advocacy trips to lobby for more funding to be allocated toward basic needs barriers, financial aid, and academic programs such as the San Diego Promise, which has benefited her with two years of free tuition.

Back at the Miramar campus, where she is studying political science, Ghotra and fellow ASG leaders are planning student activities and advocating for the expansion of mental health programs, as well as zero- and low-cost textbooks.

“I encourage all students to get involved on campus to see how the community college system works and to create meaningful changes in a space where those changes can actually happen,” Ghotra said.

In addition to her leadership roles at Miramar College, Ghotra is one of 16 students working closely with the California Mental Health Services Oversight and Commission on the Youth Advisory Group and as an intern for City Councilmember Kent Lee. She will graduate from Miramar College this spring and hopes to transfer to UC Berkeley, UC Los Angeles, or UC San Diego.

QA How did you choose Miramar College?

I always dreamt of going to college outside of San Diego but had to stay local due to suffering a rare autoimmune disease. I participated in dual enrollment with Miramar College during my junior and senior year at Mira Mesa High School. I loved it; I wish they offered courses earlier during freshman year for students who want to work toward their associate degree. My mom also went to Miramar College, which makes it more special.

QA How has your experience been at Miramar College?

Amazing! The leadership opportunities I have achieved might not have happened if I didn’t stay local and go to Miramar College. I have been able to focus on myself and truly assess what I wish to do in my academic and professional career, at my own pace — as community colleges often encourage.

QA What languages do you speak?

My native languages are Punjabi and Hindi. I was a dual English and Spanish learner in elementary school. I studied Spanish for eight years and grew up in Merced, where my predominant community included peers who came from migrant families speaking Spanish, as well as Punjabi.

Q How does speaking different languages help you relate to your peers?

A Language is a part of my identity. When I hear another student’s foreign accent or know of their ability to speak other languages fluently, I can sense a relation of our backgrounds; knowing more likely than not, we share a similar journey coming from a family or necessity that has encouraged relocation to secure an abundant life.

QA What is your favorite cultural tradition?

My family participates in a communal bonfire for Lohri, an event to say goodbye to winter and to welcome the spring. Family, friends, and community gather together to usher in new beginnings, and to celebrate light over darkness.



(From top) Saigeldeep Ghotra met with Congressman Scott Peters during an advocacy trip to Washington, D.C. Ghotra (second from right) and her student trustee peers got to visit the Supreme Court building during their advocacy trip. Board of Trustees President Bernie Rhinerson swears in Ghotra during the January Board Meeting.



SAN DIEGO PROMISE

The San Diego Promise program covers the cost of tuition for two years at San Diego City, Mesa, and Miramar colleges, and provides textbook grants to those students who qualify. The Promise program helps you get where you want to be – whether your goal is to complete an associate degree, transfer to a four-year university, or enter the workforce quickly.

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