

COMMUNITY COLLEGES

SAN DIEGO & IMPERIAL COUNTIES

CAREER EDUCATION



CAREER EDUCATION COMMUNITY IMPACT REPORT

CHANGING LIVES AND TRAINING TOMORROW'S WORKFORCE

JANUARY 2020

CHANGING LIVES THROUGH ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION

WELCOME TO OUR FIRST ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT. THIS REPORT CELEBRATES THE QUALITY OF OUR TEACHING STAFF, THE SUCCESS OF OUR STUDENTS, AND THE IMPACT WE ARE MAKING MEETING THE NEEDS OF EMPLOYERS.

Community colleges were created in the United States more than 100 years ago as a populist response to the elitism of higher education. For over a century, community institutions have been providing education and the promise of a better life to students from all walks of life, including underserved communities, veterans, older adults, first-generation college attendees, English language learners and recent high school graduates.

In an educational environment marked by inequality and skyrocketing costs, community colleges play an essential role, providing open and affordable access to the education required to achieve sustainable prosperity. These institutions also provide an ideal talent pool for local businesses, especially those struggling to fill skilled positions. In San Diego and Imperial counties, employer needs are currently focused on middle-skills jobs—positions that require more education than a high school diploma but less than a four-year degree.

Between now and 2022, the San Diego and Imperial Valley region will see an estimated 47,000 job openings per year in the area's 100 top middle-skills job categories – the vast majority of which are facing a shortage of qualified workers. Three years ago, our state's government invested in the California Strong Workforce Program and called on community colleges to use innovative regional approaches to close these urgent gaps. Our community college leaders knew that the way to succeed in this was to unite as a region, rather than as individual colleges competing for students. Through the San Diego and Imperial Counties Community College Association (SDICCCA), the 10 colleges across the two counties have long established a collaborative, sharpened focus on preparing students for high-potential jobs in our fastest-growing industries.

We partnered with local high schools, businesses, economic development councils and chambers of commerce to ensure our programs would meet the needs of employers, and increase the number of job opportunities available for our students.

As President of SDICCCA, I'm proud to report our investments are paying off. This Impact Report highlights the life-changing effects of education on our students' lives, the quality of our professors, and the benefits of our work for local employers. I hope you will find these stories as encouraging and inspiring as I do. Rather than focusing on enrollment numbers, grade point averages or the ever increasing cost of living, this report looks at the people behind the numbers. Our aim: to showcase how our students are seen, valued and taught.

Community colleges have long been the problem solvers of America's educational system. We're here to retrain workers during economic recessions; provide direction for recent high school graduates; and to guide first-generation students through the higher education process. I'm deeply proud of what we've accomplished, and look forward to what we can accomplish if we continue working together as a community.

- Dr. Kindred Murillo, President

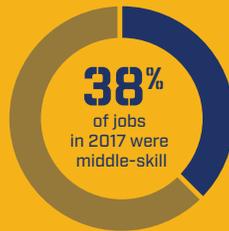
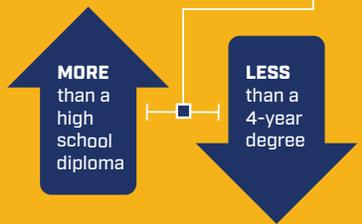
MIDDLE-SKILL JOBS DRIVE THE REGIONAL ECONOMY

Businesses need more qualified candidates to fill good-paying middle-skill positions. Career Education at San Diego and Imperial Counties Community Colleges hold the key to unlock these growing, in-demand jobs.

THE OPPORTUNITY

Middle-skill jobs are large and growing—and these jobs pay well.

MIDDLE-SKILL JOBS REQUIRE



Of the **1,583,115** jobs
in **San Diego and Imperial Counties**



MEDIAN HOURLY RATE

THE JOBS

Career Education can quickly launch you into these careers.

of graduates
71% ARE EMPLOYED
ONE YEAR AFTER
finishing their program

ADVANCE YOUR CAREER BY



TOP 9 IN-DEMAND SECTORS

- 1 Advanced Manufacturing
- 2 Advanced Transportation and Logistics
- 3 Global Trade
- 4 Energy, Construction, and Utilities
- 5 Health
- 6 Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and Digital Media
- 7 Life Sciences and Biotechnology
- 8 Business and Entrepreneurship
- 9 Agriculture, Water, and Environmental Technologies

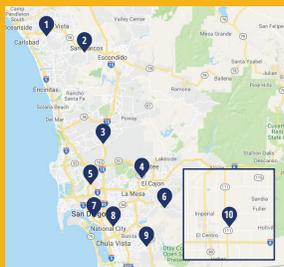
GET CONNECTED



THE REASONS

Career Education gives students a wide variety of program choices at multiple campuses —at a fraction of the cost.

OVER 200 PROGRAMS AND 10 COMMUNITY COLLEGES



- | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1 MiraCosta College | 6 Cuyamaca College |
| 2 Palomar College | 7 San Diego City College |
| 3 San Diego Miramar College | 8 San Diego Continuing Ed. |
| 4 Grossmont College | 9 Southwestern College |
| 5 San Diego Mesa College | 10 Imperial Valley College |

\$46
per credit
Community Colleges
are the best value.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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CAREER EDUCATION

CareerEd.org

BREAKING THE METAL CEILING

Andrea Cook | San Diego Continuing Education | Certified Welder

Andrea Cook was a theater major heading for a career in teaching when health problems derailed her education. After a lifetime of waiting tables, Cook moved to California and began looking for a career with more room for growth. She used to build lighting and stages for her school's art department and decided to return to school to learn to weld.



Cook enrolled in San Diego Continuing Education's (SDCE's) free welding certificate program. SDCE offers 70 free career training programs including five industry-recognized, state-approved welding certificates.

"We began class by learning temperatures and how metal melts, then we moved on to blueprints and symbols," said Cook, remembering her first semester.

SDCE welding courses take just 24 weeks and cover a series of welding practices, as well as math, communications, and business skills relevant to employment in the industry. This fall Cook became a certified welder, completing her Shielding Metal Arc and Gas Tungsten Arc certificate programs.

Women make up just four percent of the welding, soldering, and brazing workers in the United States, according to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The median annual wage for this trade was \$41,380 in May 2018.

"The men don't expect me to be here and to tough it out," Cook says jokingly. "That's what makes me want it more."

Cook is continuing her training and plans to start her own architectural lighting design business. SDCE offers cost waivers for transportation, textbooks and equipment to students enrolled in a nontraditional area of study through the institutions' New Horizons/Gender Equity center.

"Forward thinking employers encourage gender diversity in the workplace," said Carlos O. Turner Cortez, Ph.D., president of SDCE. "As the older populations of welders retire, the nation's labor gap increases and the demand for skilled workers becomes urgent, especially for women."



MAKING DREAMS COME TRUE: ON THE AIR, BEHIND THE CAMERA

Javi Moreno | San Diego City College | ICT Digital Media, Media Marketing & Management, Special FX Makeup, Graphic Design

Javi Moreno decided he wanted to work in the music industry when he was just eight years old after his mom took him to a TLC concert. His lifelong passion for entertainment led him to the City College Media, Marketing and Management program, which is led by working professionals who give students insights into career opportunities while providing hands-on training for in-demand job skills. While there, he gained experience working in front of and behind a camera and learned what it would be like to work in the entertainment industry.



“Having industry professionals as instructors and resources has been incredible, especially when it comes to career guidance. City’s associate degree in radio program, led by KFMB Program Director Dave Sniff, provided me with the hours of practice I needed to grow as an artist and become more confident not just a person, but as a public speaker in general,” Moreno said.

Though he originally intended to start work after completing the media program, Moreno was drawn to the award-winning work coming out of City’s Graphic Design department. His previous experience in the printing industry convinced him that adding a graphic design degree to his resume would make him a stronger job candidate.

While completing that degree, Moreno met the instructor who would truly change his life – Professor Andrea Singer. A long-time teacher in the graphic design and performing arts departments, Singer was just starting a Special FX Makeup program at City – the first program of its kind in the nation. Moreno immediately joined the program to further complement his growing portfolio of certificates, degrees and skills.

“I had previously looked into a similar program in Los Angeles, but when I saw the price tag, my dreams were immediately shattered. She basically made my dreams come true. Being able to work with industry standard equipment and using professional grade materials really gave us the firsthand experience on what it’s like to work as a makeup artist in the entertainment industry,” Moreno said.

Moreno finished his studies in December 2019 and has been working in the field completing an internship at a digital advertising agency and working on tour doing makeup for a celebrity in the entertainment field. Moreno believes experience at City College was the ideal preparation to work in the entertainment industry today.

“The amount of relationships I have created has been rewarding enough in itself. Being able to surround myself with like-minded individuals makes being a creative personality very joyous. The most inspiring part of this process, however, is being recognized by your professors for your progression and growth of your talent. They genuinely care about their students and believe in their success. I am forever grateful to them,” Moreno said.



CODING, COUTURE, AND COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Crystal Crawford | San Diego Mesa College | Computer Science and Fashion

Imagine a shirt that records your heart rate and other vital signs, or athletic wear that responds to your body's temperature. San Diego Mesa College computer science and fashion major Crystal Crawford has—and her goal is to combine her two passions to design these types of smart garments.



"I've been in fashion design for a while, and I was always interested in tech growing up, like computer programs and video games," said Crawford, who works full-time as a systems analyst at Qualcomm while taking classes part-time. "I'd always wondered how people could incorporate more wearable technology into clothing, but thought it might be too crazy and futuristic for people to take seriously."

But after attending a Mesa College fashion department event where an industrial engineer spoke about the possibilities of smart garments, the idea didn't seem so crazy anymore.

"That really opened my mind, and it was amazing to see people doing things that I didn't think were possible. I had no idea that fashion

designers all over were already collaborating with engineers, and that really sparked my desire to combine technology and fashion."

Learning about the possibilities of wearable technology inspired Crawford to teach herself coding on the side, take more programming classes and add a major in computer science.

To position herself for tech job openings, Crawford worked with the Mesa College career center staff on her resume, and practiced interviewing skills. Mesa College's career center, she says, gave her the confidence to go after a Qualcomm internship advertised by Girl Develop It, a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping adult women learn web and software development which Crawford had been involved with for years.

That internship led to the job she has right now.

"The people at the career center really got to know me as a person. I've got a non-traditional student background, but they listened to me, helped me build up the job search and interview skills I was missing, and most importantly, they connected me with the right people."

Connections are the reason Crawford recommends a community college education to anyone who wants to pursue a new career path or learn different skills.

"The classes are smaller, there are more professors actually working in the field, and it's been really helpful having hands-on experience as part of my coursework. Mesa has helped me connect with the right people, which in turn led me to where I am now at Qualcomm—I get to work with people every day who are doing some really cool things while taking on coding projects that challenge me."

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES, ONE JOB AT A TIME

Bruce Reaves | Palomar College | Job Developer and Case Manager

Bruce Reaves wears many hats. As Palomar College Job Developer and Case Manager, Reaves works directly with businesses to create internships, apprenticeships, and job opportunities for Palomar students, and coaches students at every step of their search for employment.

In addition to teaching technical skills, “Community colleges are really good at teaching students confidence,” states Reaves, who noted that Palomar College was one of the first community colleges in the region to hire a dedicated job developer.



Reaves says his previous career in criminal justice, and his experience teaching human resource management, helps him understand business’ employment processes and relate to students from all different backgrounds, particularly those who have had obstacles to overcome. Reaves said his position has helped him continue his lifelong passion of closing the equity gap.

“Many of the students who come through our doors may not have had much in the way of support or opportunities to develop their professional presence—that’s something that takes time and individual attention,” said Reaves. Thanks to Reaves’ work and the relationships he and his colleague Jason Jarvinen have built with employers, Palomar is now viewed as a source of “hidden gem” job candidates.

Regarding finding jobs for students, Reaves said, “It’s pretty easy—lots of local business owners went to Palomar, so they’ll pick up the phone when I call. The challenge is finding the range of employers to hire students from our more than 15 different programs.”

Reaves and his office negotiate with employers on behalf of students who they know are a good fit for certain job openings but might not tick off every single box in the job description. Reaves notes it is important to match the job, the employer and the students to ensure the best outcomes. For example, some students are most comfortable working for smaller companies while others thrive in larger organizations. Additionally, he connects employers with the academic deans and professors to share current industry-related trends so they can tailor their programs as needed to prepare students for work in fast-growing industries.

When asked about his favorite student successes, Reaves proudly recounts multiple stories, including one of a computer science graduate who had a long gap in employment. “He used to work for a large IT company maintaining computer systems but was laid off. He went back to school at Palomar to learn coding—but once you leave the IT industry, it’s extremely hard to return, so his confidence was low. After working extensively on his resume and interview skills, I referred him to one of our partner companies. They hired him with a salary of \$52,000. Not bad for someone who was unemployed for almost four years!”

FINDING ENDLESS OPPORTUNITY UNDERGROUND

Sarah Hargis | Cuyamaca College | Center for Water Studies

In a recent picture, Sarah Hargis is wearing a hard hat and safety vest, and has clearly been getting her hands dirty working on a subterranean sewage pipe system. She's also grinning and flashing a thumbs-up to the camera, clearly excited to be somewhere most people would probably rather avoid.

The path to her current job as a utility worker for the Padre Dam Municipal Water District's wastewater workgroup began when she was a student at Cuyamaca College.



"Choosing which career path to take was a pivotal moment in my life," says Hargis. "I wanted a career that was challenging, had good benefits, involved skill, required a variety of work, and allowed me to work outdoors. After researching different fields, I learned that the water industry satisfied all those requirements. I can say with confidence that starting courses at [Cuyamaca's] Center for Water Studies was one of the best decisions I ever made."

Water and wastewater management is crucial to life in southern California, as many residents know. Hargis' job description includes cleaning sewer lines by operating a combination truck, also known as a Vactor, which utilizes high pressure water nozzles to flush lines, break through blockages, and removes debris. In addition, she uses a closed circuit television system with a live feed of the internal condition of the sewer line, to examine and record the condition of sewer mains and laterals.

One of her favorite parts of the job is interacting with the public. "I really like being able to give the public factual information. I like that I'm outside and able to interact with people in our community and explain how our systems work," Hargis said.

Hargis feels her experience at Cuyamaca helped her feel more prepared to take on heavy, skilled work for a city agency.

"The courses were challenging, but also had content that I found interesting and enjoyable to learn about. The professors equipped me with the proper knowledge and skills to get a job. I was able to pass my state exam my first attempt, land an internship within six months, and begin working at a Water Municipality within a year. I now have a job I am passionate about in an industry that has endless opportunity."



MOVING UP AND MOVING OUT

Sara Pfeffer | Grossmont College | Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant

Sara Pfeffer always knew she wanted to help people and work somewhere in the medical field. Not quite sure where to start, Pfeffer enrolled in biology and anatomy classes at Grossmont College.

"I knew Grossmont was well-known for its nursing school, and I certainly couldn't afford to get a loan to pay for a four-year university, but I also wasn't quite sure what I wanted to do," said Pfeffer. "I wasn't loving my classes, and lucky for me, my counselor intervened and suggested I look into occupational therapy."

The occupational therapy program at Grossmont is a small program that focuses on just 30 students per year. The two-year program cost Pfeffer \$5,000 from start to finish, including all classroom instruction, lunch, books, uniforms and supplies.

"Some people don't love the small program, but I loved it and we all became best friends. We lived, breathed, cried and bled together doing things we really loved," Pfeffer said.

At graduation, Pfeffer immediately booked 10 interviews and was offered eight jobs within several months. She decided not to stay in San Diego, based on the cost of living and competitive job market. While several of her classmates ended up staying and working several part-time jobs for the varied experience, Pfeffer decided to wait for the perfect full-time position with full-time benefits.

Five months after graduation, Pfeffer's perfect job arrived, and she moved to Lodi to work as an occupational therapy assistant at an elder care facility. She packed up her pets and moved out of her parents' house into her own apartment for the first time.

"I finally had the education to fly out of the nest," said Pfeffer. "I love having my own place and working with Baby Boomers. They are hilarious."

Pfeffer feels her education more than prepared her for the real-world functions of her job, and gave her the confidence to move out on her own. Her degree lets her help people and provides the flexibility to work with all age groups. She plans to switch to pediatrics at some point to spend time working with kids.

"All my classmates got jobs pretty quickly. We stay in touch and graduating with great jobs and no student loans means we can afford to fly around the country to see each other," said Pfeffer.



BUILDING HIS FUTURE FROM THE GROUND UP

Albert Vera | Imperial Valley College | Electrical Technology

Albert Vera, who recently graduated with an associate degree in Electrical Technology from Imperial Valley College (IVC), is a man of action.



“Community college trade courses are great, because you aren’t just sitting there in a giant hall being lectured at. You’re able to get in there and do hands-on work right away,” said Vera.

After one year at a four-year university, Vera realized that a traditional college classroom environment wasn’t the best way for him to learn the ins and outs of construction and development. Community college, he said, made more financial sense as well. Having realized these things, he left his electrical engineering bachelor’s degree program and enrolled at Imperial Valley College.

“It was a lot more fun. I enrolled knowing that I wanted to get into construction, so I took courses that were immediately relevant to that first—but because there wasn’t as much financial pressure, I had more room to explore. I loved my electrical technology and HVAC classes, and I got lots of hands-on experience with all aspects of construction, like framing and welding. But I also got to do things like learn how my car worked and pick up some lifesaving skills in an EMT class.”

When it came time for him to look for a job, Vera says his instructors and the IVC Work Experience and Internship staff made all the difference.

“Professors bring up job opportunities in class, they’ll say ‘hey, just so you know, this company is hiring for an HVAC specialist, this company’s hiring for a carpenter,’ and so on. Janeth [Cruz, IVC’s Internship & Work Experience Coordinator] was also looking out for internships for students, she was a big help.”

After he completed his program, one of Vera’s professors told him about an internship opportunity with Nielsen Construction. Three months after starting as an intern, Vera was hired full-time as a project coordinator.

When asked if he likes his job, Vera says, “It’s nice. I’m not necessarily stuck in one place, and I get to know both sides of a construction project. I get to see the whole process of putting a building together from beginning to end, from groundbreaking to finishing the interior, as well as, with the documentation that goes into it.”

Down the road, Vera plans to return to IVC to get a degree in business. “I want to learn more about that side of construction jobs, and eventually move on to become a project manager.”



BIOTECH WORKERS NEEDED, NO BACHELOR'S DEGREE REQUIRED

Abe Chohan | Vice President of Operations | Inova Diagnostics

San Diego-based Inova Diagnostics is a leader in autoimmune testing, delivering highly accurate reagents and efficient automation to labs throughout the world. As Vice President of Operations, Abe Chohan and is responsible for operational management and functions, including production, facilities, maintenance, engineering, environmental, health and safety, planning, purchasing, shipping and receiving.

During his nine years working for the company, Chohan has seen significant shifts in company hiring processes, which have led to increased diversity among its more than 300 local employees. In fact, Inova recently re-aligned the job descriptions for many of its jobs and removed the focus on the four-year degree requirement as a condition for hiring.

"Candidates are coming from many different paths these days, and the students we're hiring from the community colleges are very strong and well prepared," said Chohan. "The community colleges are doing an excellent job of building relationships with employers that inform the curriculum and provide students with training in the practical skills employers need."

Along with much of the biotech industry, Inova has been experiencing rapid growth, and that has created increased pressure to fill open positions quickly with candidates who can hit the ground running. While the company still hires from four-year universities for many positions, there has been a significant shift towards working in partnership with community colleges, such as San Diego Miramar College, to create programs that directly train students in the skills employers need.

"I recently visited the Biotech department at Miramar and was very impressed by what was happening there. The classrooms were set up as hands-on labs where students were learning in nearly exact replicas of our work environment," said Chohan.

While the community college biotechnology career education program is designed to prepare students for entry-level positions, such as junior chemist or lab technician, Inova is increasingly creating new promotion and on-the-job education paths to continue challenging many of the community college hires.

The company focuses on rewarding high performers, regardless of educational background. Perks include tuition reimbursement for ongoing education, as well as advancement tracks based on demonstrated aptitude that challenge existing job requirements or descriptions.

"Many of the best engineers I've worked with don't have engineering degrees. Here at Inova, we focus on rewarding performance, commitment and hard work and that creates opportunity for everyone regardless of where they start out," said Chohan.



ENERGIZED BY HER EDUCATION

Dahlia Brown | Palomar College | Cognitive Science and Automotive Technology

Cognitive science major Dahlia Brown didn't expect to fall in love with automotive technology while a student at Palomar College. She enjoyed her computer science and psychology classes in high school and was pretty sure she wanted to continue to focus on those areas. But a campus tour before she enrolled sparked curiosity that later turned into a full-blown passion, and inspired career goals she had never considered before.



"During the tour, the guide talked about what a great automotive technology program Palomar had. At the time, I had zero knowledge about my car and how it worked, so I thought 'well OK, it would be cool to know more about that. I'm at a community college, I can take whatever classes I want, why not?'"

After one introductory class, Brown was hooked. Her previous study of cognitive science had led to a fascination with how humans interact with automation and she was especially intrigued by working with electric vehicles and self-driving cars. She began taking more classes, and pursued internships in the field that developed her unique skill set and interests.

"I shadowed a master tech at Centric Auto Repair, an auto shop right by Palomar that specializes in fixing hybrid vehicles. I loved that he made hybrid batteries in his spare time, I thought that was so cool," said Brown. That experience led to her current part-time internship at the American Lithium Energy Corporation, where she's learning how to build lithium ion batteries.

Brown says Palomar Work Experience Coordinator Jason Jarvinen "did a really good job finding stuff that interests me. He knew I didn't want to do straight-up mechanical work, but more intricate technical stuff, and work with battery technology."

While she still plans to pursue a cognitive science-focused career, her auto technology classes helped her realize the potential of applying her knowledge of battery-powered engines and artificial intelligence (AI) to optimize the cars we drive. After she finishes her studies, she hopes to go back to Palomar and complete the auto technology certificate.

Brown believes community colleges are great for sparking intellectual curiosity because of the variety of classes offered. She cites the rest of her course load, full of math and computer science classes, as evidence of the range of opportunity available.

Brown also chuckles as she talks about her peers on more traditional trajectories. "Do my friends at four-year universities know how to change their brake pads? Probably not."

MY MOM IS A SCIENTIST

Tracy Naputi | San Diego Miramar College | Quality Control Analyst, Inova Diagnostics

Today, Tracy Naputi is a scientist. But before getting career training, she was a divorced mother of five managing a McDonald's and living with her kids in her mom's two-bedroom apartment. Naputi was determined to provide a better life for her family and saw the opportunity to earn more money and spend more time with her kids if she went back to school to start a career in biotechnology.



Naputi started school in 2008, and in just two years she had completed the Biotech Program with two certificates of achievement in Applied Biotech and Biomass Production. She was hired by Inova during her second interview after graduation and has been steadily progressing up the company ladder ever since.

"I never thought the life I have today was possible for me, it's honestly still like a dream. I can take my kids to Disneyland and the Zoo and provided cars for my kids and myself - I never even dreamed I would have that freedom, let alone being able to give that to my kids. My education has changed everything," Naputi said.

Naputi had to go to night classes and says the two years of hard work were intense. She remembers the moment she knew it was all worth it. She was at back-to-school night at her kid's school when she heard one of her children proudly tell her teacher, "My mom is a scientist."

"My degree is not just a piece of paper, it's a license to go out there and get what you're passionate about," said Naputi. "Now I'm a role model for my kids, and I even get to bring them to work sometimes so they can see what I do."

Naputi recently asked her children what they valued most about their new life and their answer surprised her. "Their greatest appreciation is being able to celebrate Thanksgiving and Christmas by giving and receiving actual presents. Back when I was still in school, we couldn't really afford Thanksgiving dinner, or a tree, let alone presents. Their school Principal would put their names into the many charities around town and they would get random gifts from toy drives. Now we have a tradition to do Secret Santa and draw names during our Thanksgiving dinner and it's the thing they appreciate most and look forward to every year."

Naputi has been very successful in her career and is now working help other students by serving on the Advisory Board for the SoCal Biotech Center, where she works as a bridge between her employer and students who are working to enter her field.



BY HER OWN DESIGN

Angela Hackett | Southwestern College | Information Communications Technology and Digital Media, Graphic Design, Web Design and Development

Like a lot of moms, Angela Hackett's early career decisions were based on work she could do around her kid's schedules. After a 15-year career in food service and restaurant management—and raising four kids—Hackett decided it was time to do something just for her. She had a great job in nutrition management at a local hospital, but found the work to be more demanding than rewarding.



As she turned 50, she realized she wanted a job that enabled her to use her logic and creativity with a flexible schedule she could rely on well into retirement. She had always liked working with computers and staying up to date with technology, so she decided to go back to school to study website design and development.

After excelling in her first semesters, she decided to add courses in graphic design to her schedule. Hackett's family works in the racing industry, and she had helped out for years working on designs and decals for the cars.

"I'm always up for a new challenge. When the need arose, I remember jumping in with the race car designs, buying a vinyl cutting machine and just kind of figuring things out," Hackett said.

As she progressed, Hackett realized she only needed a few more classes to also complete her graphic design degree – a complementary skill she knew would aid her plans to start her own marketing firm. Today she owns I Can Hackett Designs, a one-stop shop for new businesses looking for logo design, websites, branding and promotion.

"I really wanted to be a role model for my kids as they entered college. They see me do it at my age they know they can do it too. I now have two kids that have attended Southwestern, and I even got to be on campus during my daughter's first semester to show her around campus."

Hackett's business is booming. She has worked with 20 companies and designed more than 25 websites – all on her own schedule.



IT'S A GREAT TIME TO BE A GEEK

Rick Cassoni | MiraCosta College | Professor, Computer Studies and Information Technology

When MiraCosta College computer studies and information technology professor Rick Cassoni reflects on his career, the one thing he always returns to is how much education changed his life—and how that influenced his decision to teach at MiraCosta.



“Education will change one’s life. I’m a first-generation college student. All of my jobs, from U.S. Navy Submarine Warfare Officer to defense contractor to civil servant at SPAWAR/PEO-C4I to working at IBM, were all enabled by education. I would not have gained the skills I needed to advance down the path that I have if it weren’t for my professors and instructors, so at a certain point I knew I needed to give back. That’s why I changed my career eight years ago and became a community college professor. It was important for me to teach near where I lived, as I wanted to make the biggest impact on my local community,” said Cassoni.

Cassoni said MiraCosta has allowed him opportunities to create relevant courses and programs in his areas of interest, including cybersecurity, data analytics, and information systems management.

“It’s a great time to be a geek,” says Cassoni. “Cybersecurity workers, data analysts, cloud computing specialists, and programmers are some of the most sought-after workers in today’s tech industry. Graduates in information technology and computer science fields will have jobs for life.”

Compared to four-year university students, Cassoni says the community college students he teaches often have more drive, preparation, and career focus—and, he realizes, more obstacles. “Many of our students come from underserved populations or potentially have young families, and they’re balancing work and family with school. They are amazing jugglers and have to reach deep each day to overcome challenges that many four-year students do not contend with.”

Cassoni sees a lot of potential in non-traditional student groups, including the veterans and working adults returning to school. “Veterans with security clearances and individuals with previous work experience are in huge demand today, as they are mature, turnkey workers that do well with little direction. Employers love them and cannot hire these graduates fast enough.”

His greatest source of satisfaction? “There is nothing better than transferring knowledge to another person so that they can realize their educational goals. Having students reach back out to you several years later and telling you the difference you made in their life is an amazing feeling!”



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