



PHOTO COURTESY OF SOCCCD PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Students make their way across campus as the South Orange County Community College District looks ahead to the next decade of growth and innovation.

## WHAT'S AHEAD

# INSPIRE 2035: COLLEGE DISTRICT'S 10-YEAR PLAN TO STRIVE AND THRIVE

## Student-oriented vision wide-ranging, practical

By Greg Mellen  
contributing writer

As the South Orange County Community College District hit the first-quarter post of the 21st century, Chancellor Julianna Barnes decided to undertake a far-reaching and ambitious effort to plan for its future and consider goals and aspirations with the release of a new 10-year strategic plan.

As its title suggests, Inspire 2035 is clearly intended to be much more than just another document destined to “sit on a shelf.”

The plan envisions new strategic objectives and facilities for the coming decade at the Saddleback College and Irvine Valley College campuses and the Advanced Technology and Education

Park in Tustin.

Crafted by a Chancellor's Planning Commission, comprised of about 40 members, the plan evolved over nearly a year and included town halls, workshops and surveys with students, staff and the community.

What emerged, according to Barnes, is “a bold and future-forward comprehensive plan.”

Elliot Stern, president of Saddleback College, said the plan is unique in that it avoids a number of the numbing cliches common to similar plans and is “something that reads well and speaks to our campuses,” he said.

The goals and priorities are simple and straightforward, being first and foremost student-centered, but also include building a positive workplace culture that supports the mission.

About the plan, Barnes wrote, “We

reaffirm our commitment to student success and equity, economic and social mobility, innovation and technology, environmental sustainability, and institutional effectiveness. These priorities position us to meet the needs of today while preparing for the challenges of tomorrow.”

### An early goal

When Barnes took the helm at SOCCCD in 2022, she said the then-existing five-year plan was near closing.

Therefore, “It was a good opportunity to launch a whole new visioning process,” she said.

A key, she said, was to include voices from across the community to ensure a collective and inclusive vision.

“It's really important to have shared ownership,” Barnes said, explaining the large number and breadth of contribu-

tors. “This plan was student, faculty and staff driven.”

### Inspire 2035 emphasizes six priorities:

- Student-centeredness
- Equitable access
- Equitable outcomes
- Economic and social mobility
- Community vitality and engagement
- Workplace culture and growth

Barnes said the “beautiful” part of the priorities is that they span students, community, faculty and staff, and unite all.

### If you build it

This effort can be exemplified by the future of physical facilities on the campuses.

Plans are in, and construction and renovation are underway on a number

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PHOTO COURTESY OF SOCCCD PUBLIC AFFAIRS

The new Saddleback College Culinary Arts building at ATEP stands ready to welcome students, offering state-of-the-art facilities for hands-on culinary training.

## ATEP

# Saddleback College programs expanded at Tustin complex

## Culinary arts, auto tech education cutting edge

By Larry Urish  
contributing writer

A collaboration between the South Orange County Community College District and the city of Tustin, the Advanced Technology & Education Park continues to expand into an influential center focused on STEM education, job-readiness programs and early college pathways. ATEP's latest addition, the 50,000-square-foot Saddleback@ATEP, is home to Saddleback College's highly regarded Automotive Technology and Culinary Arts and Hospitality Management programs. It's located near a hub of commercial businesses and industry, which bodes well for students seeking to enter the workforce or advance their careers.

“Since we're situated in the heart of Orange County, both programs can work collectively with their business partners,”

said Casey Cooper, interim ATEP operations and programs manager. “And we have coordinated partners through the county in both industries.”

Prior to last summer, both Saddleback's culinary and automotive programs were located on the college's main campus. This fall's first Saddleback@ATEP cohort, which began in August, is composed of some 200 on-site students across both programs.

“It's so exceptional to have these two programs, which blend art and science,” Cooper said. “They're so different and yet they're married so well, and they're in these two separate facilities in a way that complements each other.”

The 20,000-square-foot Culinary Arts facility features four state-of-the-art commercial kitchen labs that include large-screen monitors, allowing students to

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South Orange County Community College District  
Saddleback College • saddleback.edu ■ Irvine Valley College • ivc.edu



## STATE OF THE DISTRICT

SOCCCD Chancellor Julianna M. Asperin Barnes will be hosting a presentation on the “State of the District,” where she will be sharing new initiatives, past achievements, and future goals for the district's two colleges. The public is invited to attend.

SAVE THE DATE:  
March 4, 2026 • 4-6 pm  
www.socccd.edu





If the impacts of South County's community colleges and their graduates are not immediately seen, they are undoubtedly felt.



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



EXTRA BOOSTS

# How specialized programs helped 2 participants aim high

## A vet, a STEM-inspired student both benefit

By **Jenelyn Russo**  
*contributing writer*

Students in the South Orange County Community College District are utilizing campus resources to gain practical experience that, in turn, is helping them achieve their career goals.

Saddleback College student James Boogerd, a native of Minneapolis, served four years as a United States Marine, based at Camp Pendleton. When his enlistment concluded in 2024, he explored local education options and found his way to Saddleback, where he connected with Kolin Williams, the director for the school's Veterans Education and Transition Services program. He immediately felt at home.

"Talking to them about benefits and programs (for veterans), they're very knowledgeable," Boogerd said. "That gave me a lot of good first impressions and made me want to stay in Southern California instead of moving back home."

Now in his second year as a political science major, Boogerd is a member of Saddleback's chapter of Student Veterans of America and serves as the senator for the Veterans Student Council within the college's Associated Student Government, where he represents veterans and other military-affiliated students on campus.

"Veterans like to stay isolated or within their own communities ... so a lot of my efforts have been trying to integrate veterans into the student body," Boogerd said. "Veterans bring a lot of life experience to the student body because the military is such a unique experience."

Boogerd recently represented Saddleback at the Student Veterans of America Leadership Institute in Washington, D.C. Selected as one of only 100 student veterans nationwide, he gained insights from top executives at organizations such as Boeing and Wounded Warrior Project and left with a renewed understanding of what it means to take ownership of his past and future.

"A common theme I saw within the course is ownership ... owning your beliefs and what your core values are," Boogerd said. "And not only owning your achievements and how far you've come ... but also owning your mistakes and learning from your mistakes. Even if there's a rough experience, it's about having ownership of that and moving forward."

As part of his work with ASG, Boogerd collaborates with several Saddleback clubs and organizations to create opportunities and develop policies that support military-affiliated students. His current projects include partnering with Recycle for Veterans for a beach cleanup event and working with the school's athletic events committee to organize Military Appreciation Day at Saddleback's football game on Nov. 8.

Boogerd will pursue a bachelor's degree in political science and plans to apply for the Green & Gold Congressional Aide Program, a two-year paid opportunity for veterans to work with the U.S. House of Representatives. His long-term goals include attending law school and advocating for veterans and active service members in legal disputes. He credits the resources and support available to veterans at Saddleback for helping him build the foundation to pursue these goals.

"I'm very proud of everything I've accomplished within Saddleback, but really what's helped me accomplish this is the amazing veteran community within Saddleback," Boogerd said. "Veterans at Saddleback are very fortunate that there are great programs and overwhelming support."

**Program sparks STEM interest**

After graduating from Segerstrom High School in Santa Ana last spring, Pablo Rivera got an early start on his college education by participating in Irvine Valley College's MESA SPARK program, an eight-week summer initiative that provides underrepresented and low-income students with hands-on STEM research, skill-building and mentorship to prepare them for high-demand STEM careers.

As part of the experience, Rivera selected a project that allowed him to develop an AI-enabled weather station that used current and historical data to predict weather patterns an hour in advance. He not only gained valuable STEM skills, but SPARK also gave him the chance to get acclimated to his new campus home.

"This program has really helped me set a foot into IVC and helped me learn what there is to come," Rivera said. "It made me feel at home before I really got there, so I don't feel unfamiliar with my surroundings."

Rivera was introduced to IVC's Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement Program by his older brother, Juan Angel Rivera, a MESA participant from 2023 to 2025 who now studies mechanical engineering at Cal State Fullerton. The brothers attended the MESA SPARK program together last summer, where Juan developed an AI-powered rover that navigates autonomously and monitors temperatures to detect potential wildfires.

As the first in his family to attend college, Juan feels a strong sense of re-

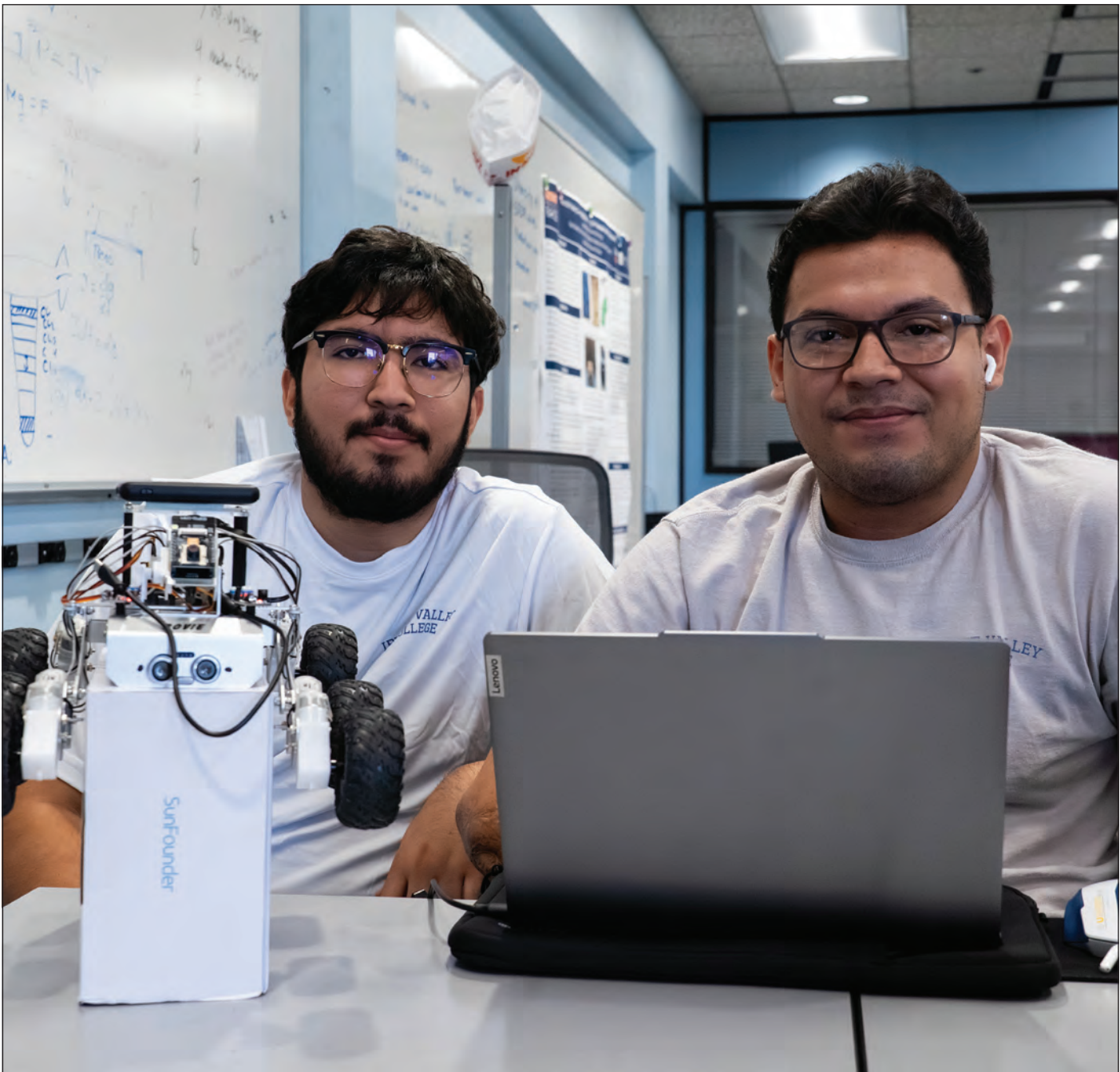


PHOTO COURTESY OF THE RIVERA BROTHERS.

Brothers Pablo, left, and Juan Angel Rivera collaborate during IVC's MESA SPARK Program last summer. Juan is studying now at Cal State Fullerton.



PHOTO COURTESY OF JAMES BOOGERD.

James Boogerd attended the Student Veterans of America Leadership Institute in Washington, D.C., in October.

sponsibility to set a positive example for Pablo and his younger siblings when it comes to building their future careers.

"I wanted to teach him everything I knew about research and help him discover his own interests," said Juan of Pablo. "Watching him grow more independent throughout SPARK makes me feel proud and accomplished, knowing he's doing his own thing now. I couldn't be more proud of the person he's becoming."

Juan Rivera received the MESA Program's Transfer Scholarship and also participated in the Undergraduate Research Experience at CSUF, opportunities introduced to him by IVC.

"The resources I was shown by IVC that are offered by CSUF, and the ways they can help me in my academic journey, I now use whenever I am looking for certain help," Juan said. "I don't know where (I would) be without (IVC's) help."

Pablo Rivera currently serves as a student assistant at IVC's MESA Center, a dedicated campus space that offers STEM tutoring and support for students' personal, academic and professional growth. He is pursuing an asso-

ciate's degree in computer science with plans to transfer to a four-year institution. Inspired by the impact IVC had on his brother Juan's career, he is grateful for MESA and the support the college provides.

"I saw what they were able to do (for Juan), and I felt like it would have the same effect on me and open the same amount of opportunities," Pablo said. "It's been positive because of how friendly the environment is at IVC and the resources that they provide to the students. A college campus can't be complete without good resources."



ANNIVERSARY

# Growing, expanding, Irvine Valley College celebrates 40 years

## Dual enrollment and ESL diversify student population

By Nicole Gregory  
contributing writer

On Oct. 22, Irvine Valley College celebrated the 40th anniversary of becoming the 105th community college in California with the unveiling of a marker that honors the many orange trees that surrounded the college when it was first established in 1985.

At that time, the college “was buried behind the orange trees at the corner of Jeffrey Road and Irvine Center Drive,” said Jan Wyma, professor emeritus of fine arts, who was interviewed in a new documentary film about the college’s history.

As a result of being somewhat hidden, IVC was unknown to many people in the area when it was established as a two-year community college after being an extension of Saddleback College.

Today it is recognized as a major contributor to the regional economy and features a campus of modern structures, with more under construction to accommodate its growing student body. The college has won many accolades, including being ranked by WalletHub as the 12th best community college in the U.S.

Student enrollment at IVC grew above 16,230 this fall, the highest number of any year in IVC’s history and a big leap since a decline during the pandemic. The campus community is diverse and includes students from more than 38 countries.

The increase in enrollment can be attributed to several factors, said IVC President John Hernandez. One is its growing number of students who are in dual-enrollment programs, which allow high school students to enroll in IVC college classes for college credit at no extra cost to them, he said.

IVC has partnerships with three local school districts, and currently more than 4,000 IVC students are in high school while taking college classes as part of a dual-enrollment program. “We’ve continued to increase our offerings at high schools,” Hernandez said, adding that 140 college classes are available to high school students.

Classes in English as a second language, or ESL, also attract students. “In a city like Irvine, which is such an international community, we have a significant population that is trying to gain English proficiency,” Hernandez said. “Many of those students come to us at various levels of their proficiency to learn the language. But many were professionals with degrees in their own countries, so we’ve started to create what I call on-ramps from an adult ESL class to actual career paths.” These include careers such as legal assistant, dental assistant and jobs in real estate and health care.

“We had 3,000 adult learners enrolled in our adult ESL last year,” Hernandez



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SOCCCD PUBLIC AFFAIRS

From left, trustee Ryan Dack, California School Employees Association President Desiree Ortiz, IVC President John Hernandez, and trustee T.J. Prendergast III celebrate Irvine Valley College’s 40th anniversary at a special campus event.

said. “This has been a tremendous area of growth for us.”

The IVC Promise program, which provides free tuition for qualified students, regardless of income, for their first two years of college, is another attraction for students. “The program includes a book voucher and wraparound support, making sure they have an education plan and that they know what their educational goal is,” Hernandez said. “We’re in our eighth cohort of IVC Promise, and this year we have 2,034 students enrolled in it. A lot of parents are seeing this as an opportunity to save a lot of money to get an excellent education that prepares students to transfer wherever they want.”

Students are supported throughout their educational journey at IVC. Since many have full-time jobs and family responsibilities, online and in-person classes are offered. Some can be done at the student’s own pace, and others are scheduled for a specific day and time. And some classes are offered as a hybrid of modalities.

The college works hard to make sure all students feel welcome and is part of a national initiative called Caring Campus. “It’s a recognition that we have a responsibility to create welcoming spaces and a culture of belonging so that when our students come here, they feel valued, they feel supported, and they don’t have to second-guess if they belong here or not,” Hernandez said. This means creating a caring campus culture with simple gestures such as reaching out to students who seem uncertain about where to find a classroom or administrative of-



The “little college in the orange groves,” Irvine Valley College, was an extension of Saddleback College when it opened.

fice and showing them the way.

Student support services, such as counseling and tutoring, are available, and for those who are food- or housing-insecure, IVC offers a free food pantry, a clothing closet and connections to rent assistance and hotel vouchers.

And the college continues to expand. A three-building, \$61 million Arts Village was completed last year, and this past May, ground was broken for two

new buildings, a Student Services Center and a Student Union building, which will be completed in 2027.

“It’s a great time to reflect on our past and celebrate our 40th year,” Hernandez said. “But it’s also a good opportunity for us to embrace everything that we’re doing now and, more importantly, to be able to look to the future and see how we can continue to build on past success.”

## WALLETHUB ANALYSIS

# SOCCCD’s colleges achieve high rankings in national study

## IVC, Saddleback among top 15

By Lou Ponsi  
contributing writer

Irvine Valley College and Saddleback College, the two colleges within the South Orange County Community College District, have been recognized in a WalletHub study for being among the top 15 community colleges in the nation for 2025.

WalletHub is a respected personal finance platform offering resources to help users manage their money, monitor their credit and make wise financial decisions.

WalletHub included more than 650 community colleges as the framework for its analysis, using criteria that included cost, financing, educational outcomes and career outcomes.

“Having both of our colleges recognized at the national level affirms the dedication of our faculty, staff and administrators, as well as the hard work and talent of our students,” said Julianna M. Asperin Barnes, chancellor of the South Orange County Community College District, when the findings of the study were released in August.

**Irvine Valley College**

The WalletHub study ranked Irvine Valley No. 12 in the nation, citing the college’s transfer success rate, academic rigor and exceptional student support services.

Irvine Valley President John Hernandez said the ranking “speaks to the power of people and purpose.”

“Our faculty and staff are deeply committed to creating pathways that lead to meaningful careers and successful university transfers, all within a caring campus culture that ensures every student feels seen, supported and valued,” Hernandez said. “We take pride in providing a high-quality education that de-

livers exceptional value — an education that equips students to achieve their goals and contribute to a stronger, more thriving community.”

The college prides itself on a holistic, caring campus culture and comprehensive student support services, the president said.

Irvine Valley also prioritizes student engagement and leadership development, as evidenced by academic teams, Associated Students of Irvine Valley College and internship opportunities, Hernandez said.

The college also listens to the needs expressed by students for purposes of planning.

Inclusivity and equity are also given precedence through programs such as Rising Scholars, designed to support students who were formerly incarcerated, Black Student Success Scholars and ELEVATE AAPI, an on-campus organization designed to serve the college’s Asian American and Pacific Islander students.

The Basic Needs Center provides food, housing and transportation resources that help students stay enrolled.

In 2024-25, the financial aid office reported disbursing \$28,783,938 in aid to 3,878 students. In the same year, the IVC Foundation reported awarding \$584,555 in student scholarships.

Irvine Valley was also recognized for its value in a report from the College Futures Foundation and The HEA Group.

“The Golden Returns: A Regional Look at the Return on Investment of California’s Community and Career Colleges” ranked Irvine Valley 13th out of 327 community and certificate-granting colleges statewide and was found to be one of only 25 institutions in California where students can recoup their educational costs in six months or less.

“Ultimately, IVC’s greatest strength is our people — the dedicated faculty, classified professionals and administrators who create a supportive and inclusive environment,” Hernandez said. “Their compassion, responsiveness and collaboration embody our Caring Campus philosophy and make IVC a place where students can truly thrive.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF SOCCCD PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Among the factors for WalletHub’s rankings were IVC’s high transfer rates and Saddleback’s strong academic programs.

**Saddleback College**

Saddleback College earned a No.8 ranking in the WalletHub study, citing the community college’s strong academic programs, high graduation rates and proven student outcomes.

The findings of the WalletHub study were announced just after Saddleback was placed first out of 42 colleges in Orange, Los Angeles and San Diego Counties for both wage gains after earning a degree from Saddleback and salary 10 years after graduation.

“We take an active approach in helping our students and making sure that they have access to the resources they may need, said Jennie McCue Executive Director of Marketing and Communications at Saddleback’s Career.

Saddleback’s Career Technical Education programs — ranging from nursing to culinary arts to automotive technol-

ogy — offer direct pipelines to employment.

The college’s Honors Program, which has priority admission agreements with UC and CSU campuses, is tailored for high-achieving students aiming to transfer to top-tier universities.

According to College Factual, Saddleback College’s freshman retention rate of 75% is well above the national average, and its four-year graduation rate of 43% is a strong showing for a community college.

“Graduates leave Saddleback with thinking skills, experience and knowledge that translate into good jobs that transform their lives,” said Elliot Stern, president of Saddleback College. “The work we do to prepare our students for transfer and careers is meaningful and adds value well beyond their time at Saddleback.”



# Campus

FROM PAGE 1

observe demonstrations without needing to crowd around their instructor. “They have a beautiful view of the instruction, whether the chef is highlighting techniques in front of them or is showing videos that have been previously sourced,” Cooper said.

The names of the student-run eatery and coffee bar — Summit Restaurant and Peaks, respectively — honor the main college’s namesake, Saddleback Mountain. The program uses Restaurant365, the same software used in back offices by working restaurants, and Toast, a point-of-service software package used throughout the industry. Along with basics such as culinary principles, food preparation essentials and sanitation and safety, this fall’s classes focus on such specialties as French bistro, Asian and Italian cuisine, wine and other beverages, several baking classes, restaurant management and more.

Students in Saddleback@ATEP’s Automotive Technology program have access to a 30,000-square-foot facility that includes classroom space and an automotive shop with 14 lift bays and workstations. “Every lift includes a massive screen and camera that have such advanced features, I’ve seen our lead instructor place a quarter on the ground at least 25 feet away and still zoom in on the quarter’s detail,” Cooper said. “The instructors can use their cameras to highlight whatever part of a car they want to discuss — the engine, under the car itself — without the students having to huddle around one little area. ... Along with the lifts, the shop area includes the demonstration lab spaces, all of the equipment and a fleet of vehicles.”

This fall’s courses include automotive fundamentals, as well as those that cover a wide range of topics in today’s industry – electrical systems, fuel and emission systems, diesel technology, and suspension and alignment, among many others – plus those that point to the future, such as autonomous vehicles and alternative propulsion systems.

One critical element of both programs is the expert instructors’ deep industry



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SOCCCD PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Inside the new Saddleback College Automotive Technology building at ATEP, modern vehicle lifts and equipment provide students with real-world training in a professional workshop setting.

experience and passion for teaching. For example, in the Culinary program, “One of our faculty is an executive chef with The Ranch (at Laguna Beach),” Cooper said. And the facility’s close proximity to the Tustin Auto Center will help Saddleback@ATEP build out its apprenticeship programming to support hands-on training for in-demand jobs.

The site was designed with sustainability in mind. Both buildings are oriented to leverage the prevailing breeze and include electric heating and cooling systems to lower greenhouse gas emissions, as well as photovoltaic panels to lower over-

all energy use.

Students have been singing high praise for the new Saddleback@ATEP campus. “It offers a lot of room for students to grow,” said Blake Lumley, who is aiming for an AA degree in culinary arts. “The different labs are very well put together so students can practice their cooking and baking skills. And Summit Restaurant is built like a professional kitchen. It provides a great opportunity to cook in a real restaurant, rather than at a lab station.”

Automotive technology student Daniella Trevino mirrors Lumley’s take on the campus. “It’s awesome here,” she

said. “I’ve seen a few different auto service areas, and the one I work at (Tuttle-Click Hyundai in the Irvine Auto Center) doesn’t compare. Neither does Porsche’s. We have everything you can think of in a shop. Every machine is brand new and state-of-the-art.”

Cooper sees top-notch quality everywhere she looks. “I really enjoy walking these facilities,” she said. ... “It’s fun to be in an environment that’s so beautiful in terms of aesthetics, and the care that goes into the teaching and the love that the instructors are pouring into the student experience is just wonderful.”



South Orange County Community College District trustees and college leaders cut the ribbon to officially open Saddleback College’s new Culinary Arts and Automotive Technology buildings at ATEP.

## ADMINISTRATION

### Blake Leonard the new SOCCCD student trustee

SOCCCD Public Affairs

Blake Leonard is the 2025-2026 South Orange County Community College District student trustee.

A political science major with a minor in international relations at Saddleback College, Leonard brings a unique blend of service, leadership, and commitment to community to his new role. A U.S. Marine Corps veteran with seven years of active-duty service, Leonard currently serves on the cabinet of the Saddleback College Veterans Club. He was inspired to pursue the student trustee position following a life-changing trip to Washington, D.C., where fellow veterans informed him that no veteran had ever held the seat.

“The Marine Corps taught me to leave every place better than I found

it,” said Leonard. “This is an incredible opportunity to serve my community, advocate for my fellow students and help shape a stronger future for all.”

Leonard’s goals as student trustee reflect his dedication to empowerment, mentorship, and leadership development.

“It takes a village,” Leonard says, “and Saddleback is filled with people who have the knowledge and passion to guide the next generation.”

As student trustee, Leonard will serve as the voice of students on the district board of trustees, representing the interests of both Saddleback College and Irvine Valley College.

“Blake brings a strong sense of service, discipline, and heart to this role,” said Chancellor Julianna M. Asperin Barnes. “We look forward to the leadership and insight he will bring to the board and to the student communities he represents.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF SOCCCD PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Student trustee Blake Leonard is sworn in by SOCCCD board President Carolyn Inmon on May 19.

## 2035

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of projects. These range from parking structures, central plants and classrooms to more engaging projects such as a student union, coffee houses and even student housing, a growing trend among community colleges.

“We want to make sure our spaces support our broader mission of a student-centered culture,” Barnes said. “Students wanted spaces where they could gather and interact and be connected.

The goal is to create beautiful, inviting campuses that create community, “not just a traditional place to go to classes and then leave,” Barnes said.

A case in point was at Irvine Valley College, where Barnes said, “We blew the wall out of the library and created an outdoor patio and coffee shop.”

Stern noted that studies show students benefit academically, socially and psychologically from every hour spent

on campus in addition to classes.

Beyond upgrading the spaces for students, Barnes said it was important to extend the district’s reach to create positive work spaces, noting that engaged and happy staff do better jobs and create a better environment and experience for students.

“We want to establish a student and workplace that is successful in the context of a positive learning environment,” Barnes said.

Taking it even further, the district is increasing efforts to attract and be inclusive of the entire community and potential future students.

“We know there are entire populations that are falling through the cracks,” Barnes said of educational shortfalls. These extend to veterans, adult learners — many of whom are working or single parents — foster youth and elderly learners.

Not to be forgotten is the Advanced Technology and Education Park, or ATEP. Included in the Tustin Legacy project that is rebuilding the city’s downtown, ATEP is a collaboration of businesses and the SOCCCD schools as

a hub for career advancement in evolving tech fields. It is also home to a new facility housing automotive, logistics, culinary arts and hospitality programs.

### Leaning into inclusivity

Finally, there is the matter of language and why it matters.

Although words such as equity, inclusion, diversity and opportunity have become highly politicized and polarizing in the current times, they are important to goals and priorities.

Rather than shy from them, Stern says SOCCCD intentionally leaned into the language and even “doubled down” on some terms.

Stern says to some, “DEIA (diversity, equity, inclusion, access) has become a four-letter word.”

However, he attributes that to misleading “narratives and tropes (that) DEI consists of lesser qualified candidates taking the place of the more qualified.”

Stern says those notions are naive, or something worse.

It is unrealistic, he said, to expect that all students enter school with equal

backgrounds, education and opportunities. And it is his job, and reward, as an educator to meet students where they are and ensure they leave with equitable chances and opportunities.

“You have to take back words and what they mean,” he said. “We stand by our language.”

Barnes said when she speaks of equity, it is about availing anyone who wants and is willing to work for the tools and education to succeed as contributing members of the larger society and the areas the district serves.

Whether it’s maintaining its reputation as a top value for students, a destination for top educators, or a place where no matter one’s background, they can strive and thrive, Barnes says SOCCCD is ready to meet expectations going forward.

“Our community is counting on our colleges to produce skilled, educated workers to enter the community and take jobs. We can’t do that unless we’re serving all our community.”

As Barnes looks at the next 10 years, she says simply, “We’re going full throttle. Full force.”



DISTRICT PARTNERSHIP

ASU Online to offer reduced tuition to transfer students

SOCCCD Public Affairs

Students from Saddleback College and Irvine Valley College now have a new, more affordable path to earning bachelor's degrees online, supported by a new partnership between the South Orange County Community College District and Arizona State University.

Beginning this fall, eligible students and alumni can save 22% on tuition when they transfer to ASU Online through the California Community College Achievement Plan.

The opportunity is part of the university's broader effort to increase access to higher education for students, including those at Saddleback and Irvine Valley Colleges. This seamless and affordable transfer pathway for California residents reduces financial barriers and supports students who need flexibility and options for an education that prepares them for the future. There are

no income requirements to receive the tuition reduction.

"This collaboration opens new doors for our students, providing a seamless and affordable transfer pathway to one of the nation's leading research universities," said Julianna M. Barnes, SOCCCD's chancellor. "It reflects our commitment to preparing students for high-demand careers and ensuring that geography or finances are never a barrier to achieving their educational goals."

The program is a promising opportunity to expand access to undergraduate degrees from a global research university, especially for place-bound students and those in regions without nearby higher education institutions.

ASU Online provides top-tier university resources and support. Students can choose from 180+ undergraduate degrees — all taught by the same faculty using the same curriculum available on campuses.

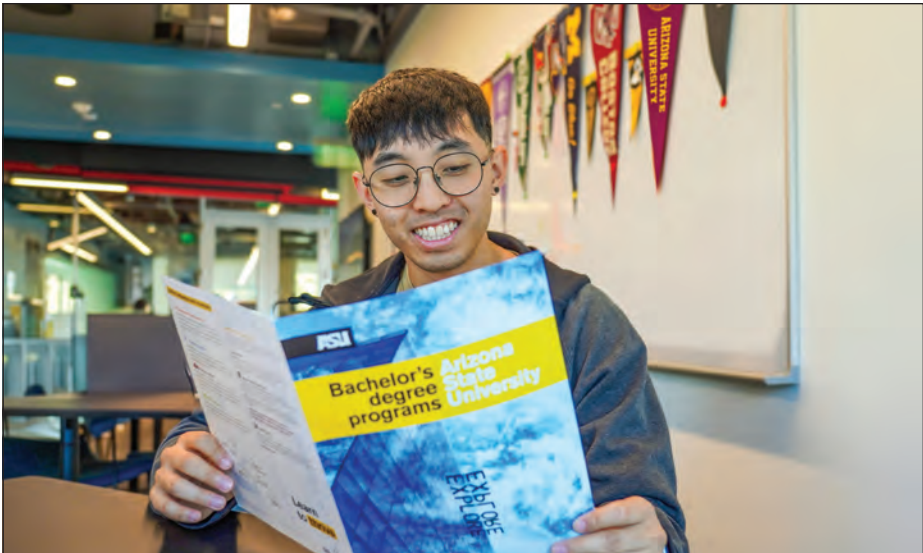


PHOTO COURTESY OF SOCCCD PUBLIC AFFAIRS

A Saddleback College student reads about the new partnership between SOCCCD and Arizona State University Online giving students an affordable pathway to earn their bachelor's degrees.

STATE RANKING

IVC, Saddleback among top 25 community, career colleges with fastest return on investment

SOCCCD Public Affairs

Irvine Valley College and Saddleback College, both part of the South Orange County Community College District, have been named among the top 25 community and career colleges in California for delivering the fastest return on investment for students, according to the Golden Returns report released by the College Futures Foundation in partnership with the HEA Group.

In a statewide analysis of 327 institutions, Irvine Valley College ranked in the top 25 for providing students the shortest time to recoup their educational costs. The colleges were evaluated using a Price-to-Earnings Premium metric, which calculates the time it takes for students to earn back the net cost of their education based on the income premium they gain by attending college.

"These rankings underscore our district's commitment to delivering affordable, high-quality education that leads to real economic mobility for our students," said Chancellor Julianna M. Asperin Barnes. "At IVC and Saddleback, we are preparing students to transfer or enter the workforce, but most importantly, we are changing lives."

The Golden Returns analysis covers

1.2 million undergraduate learners across 12 economic regions in California. Each of the top 25 colleges—including IVC and Saddleback—enables the typical student to recoup their out-of-pocket costs within six months of earning a credential.

Most institutions on the list serve high numbers of low-income students, charge less than \$5,000 per year, and demonstrate typical earnings at least \$10,000 higher than those of high school graduates in the state.

"These results reaffirm that a community college education—especially at IVC and Saddleback—is one of the most effective investments a student can make," said Board President Carolyn Inmon. "Our colleges are providing not only accessible pathways to degrees and careers, but also a fast track to financial security for thousands of students."

The report provides regional insight into how California's community and career colleges are driving economic outcomes, emphasizing the need for transparent data to guide student decision-making and institutional improvement.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SOCCCD PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Saddleback College nursing students engage in hands-on training, gaining the skills and confidence to care for their communities.

Two Great Colleges Make One Great District

Saddleback College and Irvine Valley College have earned several accolades this year, including the prestigious recognition from the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program, where both colleges have been named one of the Top 200 community colleges in the nation. With strong transfer and graduation rates, as well as impressive academic programs and exceptional student services, the colleges offer thousands of students pathways to reach their career and educational goals.

ASPEN PRIZE  
FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE EXCELLENCE  
aspen institute

TOP 200  
2027

Irvine Valley College • [ivc.edu](http://ivc.edu)

ASPEN PRIZE  
FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE EXCELLENCE  
aspen institute

TOP 200  
2027

Saddleback College • [saddleback.edu](http://saddleback.edu)



South Orange County Community College District

"Our district is unique in that we have two nationally ranked colleges serving our communities. It's proof that when you choose a South Orange County Community College District college, you are choosing one of the best in the country."

— Dr. Julianna M. Asperin Barnes, SOCCCD Chancellor