

# WE



City College  
Mesa College  
Miramar College  
College of Continuing Education

## LEADING THE SDCCD

Story on page 8



# INGREDIENTS FOR CONTINUED SUCCESS

Since starting in July, I have had occasion to talk with many people inside and outside the District, and what I have heard boils down to two basic themes.

First, as a District, we do many things very well. In fact, we are the envy of many up and down the state in areas that matter the most. This includes ensuring equity and access for all students. It includes supporting our outstanding faculty and classified professionals with career development opportunities. It includes providing

colleges are to realize their full capacity as engines of educational and economic advancement, we must do better for all students. Too frequently, we see students from certain neighborhoods and socio-economic groups who struggle and fall by the wayside. In spite of our region's incredible wealth and prosperity, there are many in San Diego who go hungry each day or do not have a permanent place to live.

How do we get better? That question will be the focus of a districtwide strategic planning process that we will begin in early 2022. While each of our colleges has fully developed strategic plans, this will be the first time the District has fully integrated these plans. I am excited to hear the feedback of all stakeholders — this includes community members but also employees from all areas of our organization. I truly believe some of the best ideas will come from individuals who have not always participated in these discussions.

At the same time, we are going to be very active working with our community partners and elected representatives to identify additional resources. This includes seeking philanthropic support and legislation that directly benefits the District and its students. Philanthropic priorities will be established in the strategic planning process. As for legislation, areas of focus will include student housing, financial aid, and models of alternative policing. Despite serving — by far — the most students in California, community colleges still receive a fraction of the funding compared to our state's public universities. Additional funding is an investment that will allow us to better serve our students and produce graduates who will enrich our workforce.

In short, we can and will make a difference. I believe we are uniquely positioned to create transformational change for our students and the San Diego community.

Sincerely,

Carlos O. Turner Cortez, Ph.D.



Distributing free, nutritious food to those in need is one of the many ways the District excels at ensuring equity and access for all students.

facilities and instructional equipment that are second-to-none. And, it includes tackling some of our biggest challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, head-on. I am especially proud of how our employees have responded since the start of the pandemic. This has been such a difficult period for everyone and yet our people have pulled together to provide our students with opportunities to continue making progress toward achieving their educational goals.

The second theme I have heard is that we can do even better. As a District, we are fortunate to be located in a dynamic urban setting. We enjoy strong support from the community, including employers and public officials. Our colleges have well-established academic programs and collaborations with our K-12 partners. We have all the ingredients for continued success. However, if our

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Bachelor's degree programs, like the one at Mesa College, will be expanded throughout the California Community Colleges system.

## GOVERNOR SIGNS HISTORIC LEGISLATION

On October 7, California Governor Gavin Newsom signed legislation that expands and makes permanent the state's pilot program allowing community colleges to offer bachelor's degrees in specific workforce fields not offered by the University of California or California State University systems.

Assembly Bill 927 eliminates the 2026 sunset date on 15 existing baccalaureate degree programs, including Mesa College's Health Information Management program, and opens the door to as many as 30 new bachelor's programs per year at any of the

state's 116 community colleges. The bill was sponsored by the Chair of the Assembly Higher Education Committee, Jose Medina (D-Riverside).

The bill establishes a process for the California Community Colleges Chancellor to consult with and seek feedback from the CSU and UC systems on proposed baccalaureate degrees and requires individual districts seeking approval to provide evidence of unmet workforce needs.

"This is an historic decision that sets a bold direction for California's 116 community colleges, enabling them to meet the workforce needs of

local communities in an accessible, affordable, and high-quality manner," said Constance M. Carroll, Ph.D., president and CEO of the California Community Colleges Baccalaureate Association, who recently retired after serving 17 years as chancellor of the San Diego Community College District.

Approximately 60% of students enrolled in current community college baccalaureate programs come from communities of color and disadvantaged backgrounds, and are paying a little more than \$10,000 — a fraction of what it would cost them at private institutions.

## SOUND THE HORN FOR CARMENCEMENT

With the COVID-19 pandemic still a danger, commencement ceremonies rolled through San Diego City, Mesa, and Miramar colleges, as well as the San Diego College of Continuing Education, in celebration of a record 12,500 degrees and certificates conferred. Students, along with friends and family members, cruised through campuses in decked-out cars to receive their degree, certificate, or one of the 25 bachelor's degrees awarded for spring 2021. Those without cars were able to join the festivities on decorated golf carts. The drive-thru events, which took place at the end of May to the beginning



City College

of June, were accompanied by virtual commencement programs on May 21 tailored for each of the colleges. If coronavirus cases remain low, the District hopes to return to in-person ceremonies for spring 2022.



Miramar College



Mesa College



College of Continuing Education



## CITY COLLEGE PROFESSOR SHOWCASES FILM DURING LOCAL FESTIVAL

Cy Kuckenbaker is not only an award-winning filmmaker, but he is also a Professor at San Diego City College.

Professor Kuckenbaker has been making films for more than 20 years and his work has been selected for numerous film festivals and nominated for several awards (winning twice), and he has screened his films at prestigious venues

all over the world. Earlier this year, his film “Tiger Oak + Echo” was selected for the 2021 GI Film Festival San Diego and was nominated for Best Short in the Local Film Showcase.

The story of “Tiger Oak + Echo” is part of Lithuania’s history of fighting Soviet Union occupation during the Cold War through a non-traditional war. The fighters, known

as Forest Brothers, were civilians who battled Soviet military from the treetops. The film portrays a boy who thought he’d become a man through killing.

In scripting the story, Kuckenbaker wanted the audience to know that when violence is depicted in films, the story is much more powerful when there’s an understanding of the real consequences of

the choices that are made.

For the film, Kuckenbaker was the writer, director, editor, and executive producer. He first conceived of the story when he visited Lithuania after serving in country with the Peace Corps, and then returned there to shoot the film with an all-Lithuanian cast and crew.

Professor Kuckenbaker has taught in the commu-

nity college system for 11 years, 10 of which have been with the Radio, TV, and Film (RTVF) program at City College. He remains passionate about teaching, and, while he enjoys filmmaking, he said, “Students are number one for me. I enjoy teaching a diverse group of people who are pursuing different degrees and come from different backgrounds.”

## MIRAMAR STUDENT GIVES NEW MEANING TO “SOCCER MOM”

Chances are you have heard of “soccer mom” as a reference to the minivan-carpooling, sideline-cheering, orange-slicing mother of kids who play soccer. At San Diego Miramar College, Brandi Mitchell brings a whole new meaning to the term.

At age 45, Mitchell is the newest member of the Miramar College women’s soccer team, as well as being the mother of two grown children. A quarter-century removed from her high school playing days, Mitchell is giving college athletics another chance.

“I am at a place in my life with plenty of game time in recreational leagues, but I hadn’t had any training since I was 17 years old, and I wasn’t getting any better,”

said Mitchell, who runs an organization called San Diego Soccer Women, which advocates for women to play soccer at older ages.

As a result, Mitchell decided to sign up for the college’s summer women’s soccer class, where she realized there was an open spot on the intercollegiate team for the fall. Since Miramar College students must take 12 units, nine of which must be academic, joining the team also meant enrolling in college classes full time and passing all student-athlete qualifications.

Mitchell completed her bachelor’s degree and master’s coursework in International Policy Studies and French at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey in



Maverick (left) and Brandi Mitchell

1999. Her skills in small business and non-profit management are getting a boost during the fall semester with 14 units of classes in Microsoft Excel, QuickBooks, accounting, and nutrition.

“I laugh all the time at how amazing it is that I had missed

out on my dream of college soccer 27 years ago,” she said. “A missed opportunity has turned into a once-in-a-lifetime experience that I am just going to enjoy in the moment.”

While refining her passing skills on the field at Hourglass Park, Mitchell often hears the whistles from the nearby pool, where her 18-year-old son, Maverick, is a freshman athlete on the men’s water polo team. She persuaded Maverick to take Miramar College’s water polo class over the summer to start the transition from high school to community college after the pandemic lockdown. The two often cross paths in the training room, weight room, and sometimes on campus.

PSYCHOLOGY PROFESSOR GOES VIRAL ON

# TikTok

**W**hat started as a small move of helping her daughter build her social media brand has turned into her own wildly popular TikTok account.



San Diego Mesa College psychology Professor Inna Kanevsky can now add social media influencer to her résumé: she has reached 1 million followers with more than 25 million likes on her 1,400 videos that debunk misinformation and specifically focus on the field she has grown passionate about after 20 years teaching at San Diego community colleges.

A professor at Mesa College since 2005, Kanevsky began her educational career as a math teacher in Ukraine, and later earned her master's degree at Cal State Los Angeles and a Ph.D. from UC San Diego.

After a couple of her early debunking videos went viral, Kanevsky primarily started addressing misinformation. From that point on, people would tag her in any videos they found suspicious or wanted her to explain, and that became the focus of her social media fame.

Occasionally Kanevsky makes topical content for her students, but also spends a lot of time explaining how to use psychology research and how to find good sources to fact-check information.

Kanevsky recently hosted an interactive audio talk show about psychology, and she said the future could include hosting a podcast or possibly writing a book. For now, her entertaining and informative content can be found on TikTok @dr\_inna.

Kanevsky spoke to *With Excellence* magazine about her unlikely rise to social media fame, a phenomenon she still struggles to explain while also seizing the opportunity to help others.

**Q. How has the experience of being a TikTok influencer made you a better teacher?**

**A.** I have learned a lot on TikTok. I have learned from students who are on TikTok that I wouldn't have normally learned from necessarily, especially with the distance learning where it's a lot harder to connect. I have learned how they feel about breakout rooms and different types of interactions. It also allowed me to think about concepts I'm teaching and how to present them in much more concise and engaging ways.

**Q. Did you ever think you would be sharing information in such a unique format?**

**A.** No. This has been a completely wild year. The things that have happened, the interactions I've had, the press interviews, the fact I now open a class and the students already know me — I never expected any of that to happen. I never had expectations that I would be educating anyone beyond my own students.

**Q. What has been a positive experience you've had in connecting directly with a TikTok influencer whose videos were not entirely accurate?**

**A.** There have been several. One was a therapist who was sharing incorrect information I actually considered damaging. First I addressed her in the comments, but she didn't see. So I made a video in response. She got into contact with me through mutual contacts and asked for the information I had. She took down her video, and I provided her with additional resources. We're now mutuals, and we interact with each other.

## SAN DIEGO PROMISE FUNDRAISING EXCEEDS \$2 MILLION

Fundraising for the tuition-free San Diego Promise, which has opened the doors to a college education for more than 8,000 students to date, has topped \$2 million, with a record \$614,454 contributed during the fiscal year ending June 30. Included in the fundraising efforts is \$234,166 received for the September 18 gala, titled “A Legacy of Achievement: A Tribute to Chancellor Emerita Constance M. Carroll, Ph.D.” to honor Dr. Carroll, who retired on June 30 after a 17-year tenure at the San Diego Community College District and under whom the San Diego Promise was launched in 2016.

“All students deserve access to higher education, regardless of their financial situation, and these generous donations will help even more students participate in the San Diego Promise, including veterans, former foster youth, and adult learners returning to school,” said SDCCD Chancellor Carlos O. Turner Cortez. “Fundraising momentum is growing and will continue to grow as more of our region’s residents learn about the impacts this program is having on our community.”

The 2020-21 fundraising total was more than \$150,000 greater than any previous year’s total. Donations to the San Diego Promise go

directly to students, with no overhead costs applied. There are now 337 Promise programs in the United States, and the San Diego Promise has been highlighted as among those setting the pace.

Among the more generous donations in the past year include a \$200,000 matching gift from The San Diego Foundation; a \$110,000 donation from San Diego Philanthropist Roger Frey; \$100,000 from Price Philanthropies; \$25,000 from Union Bank; and \$10,000 gifts from Chancellor Emerita Carroll, SDCCD Executive Vice Chancellor for Business and Technology Services Bonnie Ann Dowd, and U.S. Bank.

## HISTORIC ECC THEATER GETS \$35 MILLION FOR RENOVATION

On October 1, President pro Tempore Toni G. Atkins, along with California Senator Ben Hueso and Assemblymember Chris Ward, presented the San Diego Community College District with a check for \$35 million to renovate the historic theater inside the San Diego College of Continuing Education’s Educational Cultural Complex (ECC).

The state funding will preserve and rehabilitate ECC, one of southeastern San Diego’s only centers for education and arts with ties to Coretta Scott King and the creation of the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. federal holiday. Theater renovations will include modern acoustic panels, sound and lighting controls, updated entries, foyer areas, and seating. Additionally, plans will update surrounding exterior patio areas, and a new community room that will welcome public use.



(From left) Chancellor Cortez accepts a check for \$35 million from Assemblymember Chris Ward, President pro Tempore Toni G. Atkins, and Senator Ben Hueso to help preserve and rehabilitate the historic theater at the Educational Cultural Complex.

A planning committee will be formed and meet this fall. The project is estimated to be completed in 2024.

“This will be a theater that the community deserves,” said SDCCD Chancellor Carlos O. Turner Cortez, who accepted the check on behalf of the College of

Continuing Education, the noncredit college within the District. “One that our students deserve, and one that is deserving of ECC’s rich history and continuing mission.”

Prior to his appointment as the SDCCD Chancellor, Dr. Cortez served six years as President of the College of

Continuing Education, where he and Laurie Coskey, Ed.D., the Executive Director of the school’s foundation, established its Historic Preservation Committee. Together they are working with the City of San Diego and state officials to have ECC designated as a Civil Rights Landmark.

“ This will be a theater that the community deserves.”

— Chancellor Carlos O. Turner Cortez

# STRONGER TOGETHER

Chancellor Carlos O. Turner Cortez sees power in numbers as he takes on new role

If you ask the San Diego Community College District's (SDCCD) new Chancellor, Carlos O. Turner Cortez, Ph.D., who has inspired him most in his life, he won't hesitate in his answer.

"William Barber of the Poor People's Campaign," said Chancellor Cortez, who assumed his new role in the District, which includes San Diego City, Mesa, and Miramar colleges, and the San Diego College of Continuing Education (SDCCE), on July 1. "He believes the most vulnerable populations should work together. He pulls them together because the force is in the power in numbers."

With that belief in mind, Dr. Cortez will lead one of the largest community college districts in California and among the largest in the nation. The District's

latest census report showed many students at its colleges are among the area's most underserved populations — more than half of its students identified as people of color, more than a quarter were first-generation college students, and 44% earned less than \$33,000 annually.

"I believe that community colleges were designed to serve all members of the community," Dr. Cortez said. "I believe we have an obligation to serve those, above all, who are most vulnerable."

Chancellor Cortez has a deep background in social issues. He earned his undergraduate degree in history and sociology from Georgetown Univer-

“

I believe that community colleges were designed to serve all members of the community.”

— Chancellor Carlos O. Turner Cortez





Carlos O. Turner Cortez, Ph.D., assumed the role of San Diego Community College District Chancellor in July.

sity, a master's degree in race and gender politics from New York University, and a doctorate in education policy and administration from the University of Southern California. Having been an educator for decades, Dr. Cortez said his goal has been to level the playing field for as many students as possible.

But, he recognizes the path to achieving his goal is more complicated because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The SDCCCD is currently facing three challenges stemming from the pandemic: a decline in enrollment, a decline in revenue because of dropping enrollment numbers, and changing guidelines and restrictions.

"We need to work with the community to increase enrollment," Dr. Cortez said. "And, we need to be vigilant in our efforts to lobby our elected officials to recognize the actual costs of educating community college students."

In August, a districtwide marketing campaign was launched and the message "Your Future Starts Here" was broadcast across the city of San Diego on buses, transit shelters, and billboards, inside trolleys, and through various social media campaigns. The District expects to build on the momentum of the enrollment campaign through the spring semester when the District plans a full and safe return to campus at all of its colleges and the District Office.

## CLOSING THE GAP

Chancellor Cortez said that as he navigates further into his new role, he would like to put an emphasis on equalizing certain programs, such as attracting more female students to the male-dominated vocational programs.

"The District has made a very vigilant effort to understand which populations are disproportionately impacted across programs," he said. "We have made tremendous gains over the past year, but there's still work that needs to be done to close the outcome gap."

To improve student outcomes, Dr. Cortez said he plans to work directly with students, as well as the District's faculty, classified professionals, administrators, and Board of Trustees. He will be holding regular meetings with campus organizations such as Associated Students. He also will be meeting with local employers and industry leaders to ensure the District remains true to its role as San Diego's largest provider of workforce training and education.

"Chancellor Cortez is an innovative, entrepreneurial, energetic, and proven leader who is committed to participatory governance," said SDCCCD Board of Trustees President Maria Nieto Senour, Ph.D. "He clearly understands the dynamics of a large, multi-college district as well as the dynamics of the community the SDCCCD serves."



Dr. Cortez recognizes that in order to improve student outcomes he will need to work directly with students, including holding regular meetings with campus organizations, as well as the District's faculty, classified professionals, administrators, and Board of Trustees.





(Top) Dr. Cortez marches with students, faculty, and classified professionals from the College of Continuing Education during the 2020 Martin Luther King Jr. parade in downtown San Diego. (Middle) To help increase enrollment, the District launched a citywide campaign ahead of the fall semester that includes the message "Your Future Starts Here" on bus wraps, billboards, transit shelters, and social media. (Bottom) The District played host to the Association of Community College Trustees Leadership Congress this fall and Chancellor Cortez spoke at several events, including the General Assembly welcome.



“If you believe in what you’re doing, and can clearly make your case, there are enlightened leaders in the community who will support you.”

— Chancellor  
Carlos O. Turner Cortez



Chancellor Cortez attended the September A Legacy of Achievement gala honoring Chancellor Emerita Constance M. Carroll and benefiting the San Diego Promise with his spouse Edward (left) and mother Laura.

In addition to closing the gap among the student population, Chancellor Cortez hopes to diversify the faculty at the District’s colleges. Over the next two years, there are plans to add 25 full-time faculty at the colleges — for which the District is receiving \$2.9 million in state funding specifically to fund the new positions.

Achieving the District’s lofty Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion goals are but one of Dr. Cortez’s priorities as he begins his

chancellorship. Other items on his checklist include building affordable student housing on SDCCD campuses, addressing campus facilities needs through another bond construction campaign, and establishing the District as a leader in training police officers in non-lethal force and other alternative policing methods. He knows each of these initiatives will require considerable public and private investment to be successful. Chancellor Cortez embraces the

challenge.

“If you believe in what you’re doing, and can clearly make your case, there are enlightened leaders in the community who will support you,” he said.

That is exactly what happened in July when California Senate President pro Tempore Toni Atkins announced the District would receive \$35 million in state funding to renovate the historic theater at the Educational Cultural Complex, a campaign

Dr. Cortez kick-started as SDCCE President. Cortez is unapologetic in his willingness to meet with any donor or public official to make the case for support, and his enthusiasm was described by Senator Atkins as “a good kind of contagious.”

“We have to remain forceful in our efforts to demand adequate resources — equitable resources — to support our students,” said Chancellor Cortez. “For me, it starts and ends with our students.” **WE**

# On a Personal Note...



(Above) Chancellor Cortez has always found Nina Simone to be “fantastically interesting.” (Right) As a youth, Dr. Cortez raised rabbits.



**C**arlos O. Turner Cortez has been working a mile a minute since he took over as head of the SDCCD this summer. Although he’s been in the spotlight to talk about the District, its current challenges, and the pandemic — little has been shared about his life beyond the District. Recently, the Chancellor gave *With Excellence* a glimpse into his personal world, sharing insight into his hobbies, hopes, and ... rabbits.

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

**A** I raised rabbits as a child, specializing in Holland Lops.

**Q When you’re not at work, what are you doing?**

**A** My favorite extracurricular activities include running, hiking, biking, gardening, community organizing, traveling, going to the beach, and spending time with my three bulldogs: Beyoncé, Amsterdam, and Grace.

**Q What one item do you always have at your desk or in your office, and what is its significance?**

**A** My mother and father gave me a globe made from precious stones and stainless steel when I graduated from college, which I always keep by my desk at work.

**Q If you could have lunch with anyone dead or alive, who would it be and why?**

**A** Nina Simone. I have always found her to be fantastically interesting. I would love to break bread with her to learn more about what made her so fabulous.

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

**A** Get connected. Evidence shows that students who become connect-

ed to the college community are most likely to be successful. I urge students who are new to the District to join a club, play a sport, become part of student government, participate in campus events, get a job on campus, travel abroad, or volunteer to improve our community through a service-learning experience.

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

**A** I would love to be remembered for my love of teaching and learning. Further, I hope I would be remembered for being kind, for trying to be a good person, and for serving others.

**Q What is one thing you wish all people knew about the SDCCD, its faculty and classified professionals, and its students?**

**A** Colleges are organizations composed of humans serving other humans. The people who work for the San Diego Community College District truly care about the students and families we serve. I would love for the larger community to know that the faculty and classified professionals consistently work above and beyond the call of duty. Tens of thousands of students transform their lives each year thanks to the tireless dedication of the wonderful people who work for the SDCCD.

# SUPPORTING OUR VETERANS AT HOME

SDCCD programs and support services help military members prepare for civilian life

**A**s military men and women transition from active duty, thoughts of “what comes next” are often prevalent. The San Diego Community College District, through various support services and workforce training programs, has positioned itself as a leader in helping veterans on the next step of their journey.

Whether looking to capitalize on GI Bill benefits, which help with tuition and provide book stipends and a housing allowance, or entering workforce training programs to help turn military experience into job skills that more easily translate to a new career, San Diego City, Mesa, and Miramar colleges, as well as the San Diego College of Continuing Education (SDCCE) have a variety of programs and dedicated classified staff to support active duty military, veterans, and military families. In fact, the SDCCD serves approximately 6,000 such students.

For U.S. Navy veteran Amor Carchano, he wanted a college where he could study computer programming. After a visit to Miramar College, he fell in love with the beauty of the campus and the people. For Carchano, going to college was more than taking classes and getting good grades; he also wanted to give back to his military brothers and sisters, and his fellow students.

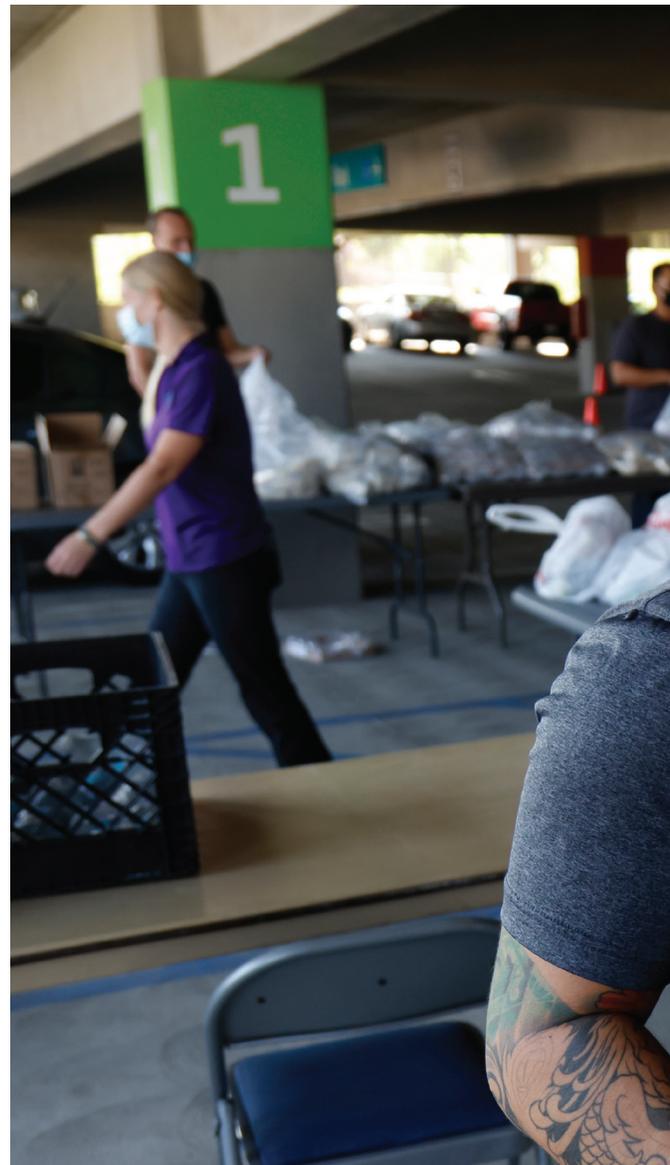
Carchano, who came to Miramar College in 2019, is enrolled in the information sciences program and plans

to transfer to a four-year college. After earning a bachelor’s degree, Carchano hopes to work in higher education, specifically in support services.

In his free time, Carchano helps run the campus food pantry, Jet Fuel, and is President of the Student Veteran Organization (SVO). As part of the SVO, he makes it his goal to share campus resources, including Disability Support Programs and Services (DSPS), financial aid, and how to get involved in campus life, with student vets who may not know what is available to them while at Miramar College.

“I want to teach veterans how to network with their colleagues and professors because the more doors you open, the more successful you will be,” Carchano said.

Mesa College Veterans Success Center and Records Supervisor Vicki Hernandez has been working with military students for over 15 years. She has seen military students struggle as they transition from active duty to active student, and she wants to do everything she can to make them successful. Recent-



(At right) Each year the District Office hosts veteran classified professionals and administrators for a Veterans Day program. In 2019, SDCCE student Mario Sanders (center) shared his military story and experience with Continuing Education's Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) program. (Below) Miramar student veteran Amor Carchano helps sort fresh vegetables during a JetFuel food distribution event.



(At right) Before the COVID-19 pandemic, City College would host a luncheon for its campus veterans among other Veterans Day Week activities. (Below) Vicki Hernandez (center) welcomes Mesa College students to the new Veterans Center on campus.



At the Veterans Center at Mesa College, Vicki Hernandez (right) connects students with various resources to help them transition from community college to four-year universities and/or civilian jobs and careers.



ly, this includes helping to open a new campus Veterans Center that is nearly three times the size of the former space, and provides classroom space, meeting rooms, lounge areas, and state-of-the-art technology for students.

“The veterans have given so much to their country; they deserve a place on campus to call home that will set them up for success,” said Hernandez. “Our new center will be a one-stop shop — from academic counseling to career services, to a place to relax with students who are just like them.”

When it comes to her students, her philosophy is “to go above and beyond,” like organizing a virtual recognition of graduating student veterans during the pandemic. Hernandez said that it showed her students that the staff cares about them as they transition from community college to four-year universities and/or civilian jobs and careers.

City College is also leading the charge for its student veterans. Military and Veteran Student Support Services Supervisor Dora Meza is taking an opportunity during this pandemic to redesign how to best serve the college’s military population.

Meza said that her role is to simplify processes for veterans, and to advocate for them. Some of the support programs she oversees and tries to improve include academic advising, bringing disability services and students together, holding events for employers to meet

with students, and certifying students’ classes. Since military dependents and veteran students need class certification to maintain housing benefits, it is imperative the processes run efficiently and effectively.

“For me, it is all about the students,” said Meza. “I want them to know their concerns matter and I want to meet them where they are.”

U.S. Marine Corps veteran Mario Sanders credits Continuing Education’s Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) classes, which are open-entry/open-exit enrollment programs, for his success as student. Sanders, who was involved in a motor vehicle collision in 2016, is completing the requirements for transfer to a kinesiology program at a university and hopes to become a physical therapist where he can give back to fellow veterans.

In addition to the ABI program that has helped injured veterans, among other students, SDCCE also offers a variety of trade programs where student veterans are able to use their GI Bill to get the skills they need to be job-ready. Some of those programs popular among student veterans include automotive technician, auto body and paint technician, automotive service advisor, and shielded metal arc welding.

“Kudos to SDCCE for giving me the confidence to start a degree program; it is because of them that I know I can do this,” said Sanders. **we**

“The veterans have given so much to their country; they deserve a place on campus to call home that will set them up for success.”

— Vicki Hernandez,  
Mesa College Veterans Success  
Center and Records Supervisor

# Art Adaptation

Remote courses in the arts posed challenges — and yielded new opportunities to be creative

Even in times of adversity, a true artist finds a way to create. That has never been more true than throughout the San Diego Community College District, where faculty and students have found new and innovative ways to learn about, create, and share all forms of artistry during the pandemic.

“Artists are creative people; being creative is who we are,” said San Diego Mesa College Professor of fine art Alessandra Moctezuma, “and that includes discovering engaging ways to create and display art.”

Moctezuma, who teaches museum studies and is the Director of the Mesa College Art Gallery, came up with a unique way to involve students and the community during the pandemic: drive-in art exhibitions.

The first event at Mesa College was held last fall and featured 36 California artists whose works addressed the first eight months of the pandemic, as well as the social justice movements taking place across the country. During the spring semester, the Heavy Duty: A Steamroller Printmaking Exhibition, another outdoor drive-in event, was held to display large scale 3-foot-by-5-foot and 3-foot-by-4-foot fabric prints made with a steamroller.

“When I conceived of this project, I was looking for something both interesting and fun — and we succeeded,” Moctezuma said of the Heavy Duty exhibition.

Just as Mesa College made adjustments, so too did those within the art and visual studies programs at San Diego Miramar College.

According to Assistant Professor of studio art and Department Chair of visual and performing arts Jessica McCambly, who helped during the pandemic with the transition of 85 classes to online modalities, everyone was rattled at first, but there was lots of flexibility and understanding — especially from administrators, who she said trusted the faculty to make necessary adjustments to their courses.

“It’s exciting to reevaluate things and constantly adjust in innovative ways. Online classes allow for more access and to meet students where they are today,” McCambly said, adding that she hopes lessons learned during this time will not only allow for more online options in the future, but help improve in-person instruction, as well.

Artistic prowess during the pandemic extended beyond the visual arts. At the San Diego College of Continuing Education, student Joan Stevens was inspired by the connections she made in a distanced, digital world when she penned the poem “Zoom” while taking Art Appreciation as part of the

Emeritus Program with instructor Remi Dalton.

At City College, where in 2010 the Career Technology Center opened with new, state-of-the-art studio spaces, labs, and equipment for students and faculty in the photography department, the pandemic posed certain challenges to the more “hands-on” courses like Directed Darkroom Studies and lighting that require specific equipment.

According to City College photography Professor David Eichinger, who retired in July but plans on returning to teach an occasional course, at the start of the pandemic instructors had to make adaptations to lectures and assignment materials, some even learned Canvas (the District’s online course management system) for the first time.

“Delivering new information was quite easy, after you know Canvas,” he said. “Once we were home, there was very little film developing, and generally no prints. My students uploaded their images into a Discussion Forum so everyone in class could see the work and also comment on it, just like we do in my classroom.”

Eichinger said students were creative with their at-home adaptations, as well, and shared that one student even built a darkroom in a hall closet. “It was very simple, but functional,” he said.

“My portraiture students bought or built some very basic lighting kits and set up a ‘studio’ in their bedroom or garage,” Eichinger added. “One way or another, they were very resourceful and made it work.”

One such student was Helen Paggiarin.

When Paggiarin came to City College as an international student from Venice, Italy, she had not planned on taking primarily online classes for her associate of arts degree in photography since a lot of courses, like portraiture and photographic lighting technique, required studio work, expensive equipment, and subjects other than herself to photograph.

On the one hand, Paggiarin said, “I missed part of my education.” She mentioned images that she had printed and framed to be hung on display at the City College photography gallery, which closed shortly thereafter. On the other hand, she went on to share that the pandemic and moving to online learning made her “explore things in a different way.”

Paggiarin, who graduated in December 2020, also turned her room into her studio and explored different lighting techniques using natural light from her window and other items she had around her house to take self-portraits.

“We have plenty of resources,” she said. “When you don’t see clear in one way, there’s always an alternative.” **WE**

## MORE...

Read more about College of Continuing Education instructor Remi Dalton and the Emeritus Program on [page 25](#).



## "Zoom"

By San Diego College of Continuing Education student Joan Stevens

Zoom!

You have kept us alive

Saved us in

this lonely time

We have touched

our friends

colleagues as well

Communication

as important as food

is bread for the soul

We share our brains

But more, we share

our hearts

Zoom!

You have kept us alive



Professor Alessandra Moctezuma (above right) and other faculty members prepare a canvas and large-scale reliefs carved by a Mesa College student to be steamrolled and turned into ink prints as seen below drying in the campus gallery before being hung for an outdoor art exhibition this past spring.



(Top) When her portraiture course was moved from in-person to online in spring 2020, Helen Paggiarin adapted her room into a home studio and experimented with light sources she found around her house to create such images as this self-portrait titled "Sometimes We Break So Beautiful." (Bottom) Framed prints created by Paggiarin were intended to be hung at the City College photography gallery, but it never reopened before she graduated in December 2020.



# EXPLORING THE COST OF COLLEGE



Money continues to be a major concern for students wanting to further their education

Students choose community colleges for lots of reasons — flexible schedules, diverse course offerings, academic support, and great career training programs — but affordability often tops the list.

Studies show money is a major concern for students thinking not only about where to attend college, but how to navigate learning once they enroll. Nearly two-thirds of respondents in the California Student Aid Commission's 2018–19

Student Expenses and Resources Survey described cost or balancing school and work responsibilities as their greatest obstacles to succeeding in college. The good news: California's community colleges, including those in the San Diego Com-

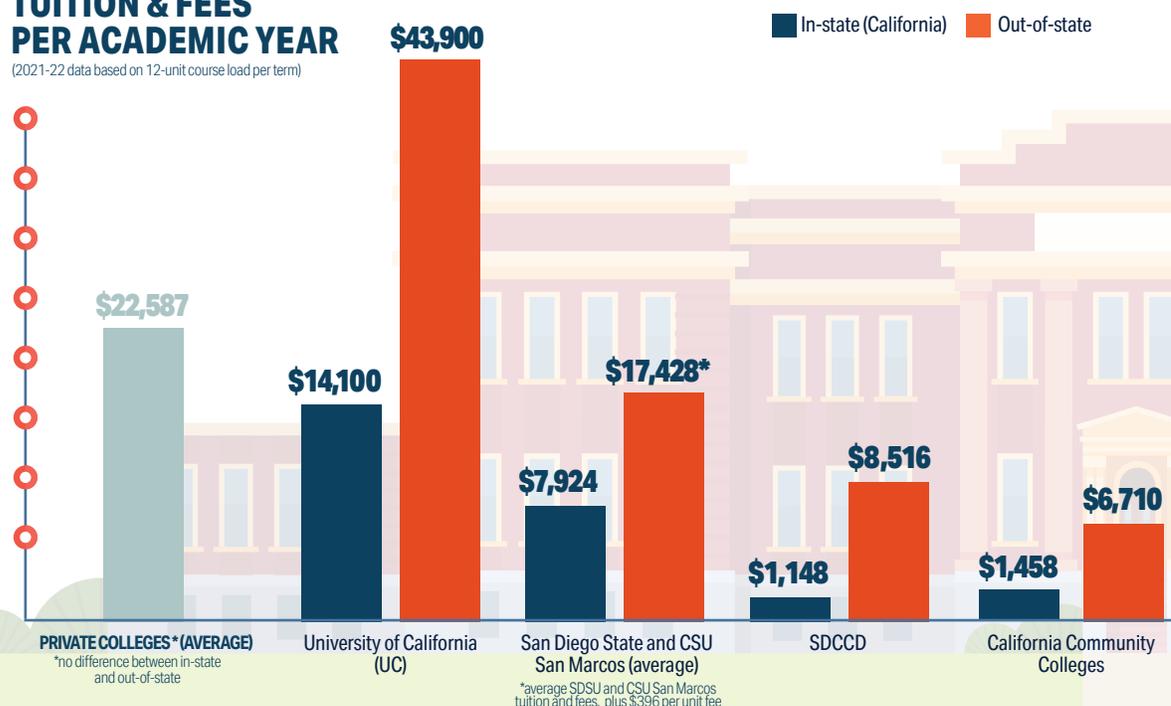
munity College District (SDCCD), are the least expensive in the country, with tuition that's about 40% of the national average and robust student aid programs that remove financial barriers and provide wrap-around support.

That's key because tuition is just one piece of the college-finance puzzle. Items such as room and board, books, supplies, and transportation drive up the total cost of attendance (COA). And multiplying those costs over four years at a

public or private university can have long-term consequences. Student loan borrowers in California owe an average of \$36,937 — a level of debt that can hold them back from starting a business, getting married, or buying their first home. **WE**

## IN-STATE VS. OUT-OF-STATE TUITION & FEES PER ACADEMIC YEAR

(2021-22 data based on 12-unit course load per term)



## 🏠 ON-CAMPUS HOUSING PER ACADEMIC YEAR

Some public and private universities require incoming freshmen to live on campus for up to two years, which can limit cost-saving opportunities. The following are some average 2021-22 costs of on-campus housing and meal plans in San Diego County:



Note: The SDCCD does not offer on-campus housing. The District estimates the cost of housing for students living at home with parents is \$6,358; for students living on their own, the estimated cost is \$11,164.

## 👤 TOTAL COST OF ATTENDANCE (COA)

Colleges are required by Congress to provide students with an estimated total cost of attendance each year. State averages are hard to come by, but here are some national averages:

	Average COA for <b>in-state</b> students living on campus at public four-year universities	Average COA for <b>out-of-state</b> students living on campus at public four-year universities	Average COA for students living on campus at <b>private universities</b>
per year	\$25,864	\$43,721	\$53,949
over four years	\$103,456	\$174,885	\$215,796

## FINANCIAL AID, INCLUDING "FREE TUITION"

California spends about \$2.2 billion per year on student financial aid, more than any other state. When it comes to grants — money that doesn't have to be paid back — the state is in the top 10 nationwide in per-student spending, according to a 2019 report by the Public Policy Institute of California.



**\$0** **SDCCD TUITION** for eligible students enrolled in the San Diego Promise

**4,000** students enrolled annually, up from 186 when the program began in 2016

Covers **TWO YEARS** of tuition at San Diego City, Mesa, and Miramar colleges

Textbook grants of **\$400** per year to students who also qualify for a fee waiver  
(the California College Promise Grant, formerly known as the Board of Governor's Fee Waiver)

## Student Impact



The cost savings associated with attending a community college are seen immediately by students transferring to a four-year university or directly into the workforce.

For Miramar College alumna Aira Aquino, who transferred to UC Riverside earlier this year, by starting her higher education journey at a community college, she was able to enter her baccalaureate program debt-free.

"I knew community colleges were cheaper, but not the big picture of just how much," she said. "A friend of mine from high school went directly to a four-year university, and she had to get a lot of loans that she now has to pay off. It was 100% worth it for me to go to a community college first."

Aquino said that she saved money living at home while attending Miramar College, and, when she got a job on campus as an Ambassador and Peer Mentor, she was able use her earnings to help take care of her family, and pay for her own car, school books, and food, instead of spending them directly on tuition costs.

Aquino was eligible for the Promise program's free tuition during her first two years at Miramar College, and financial aid helped cover costs for an additional year as she made her way toward graduating with two associate's degrees in chemistry and mathematics studies. She also took advantage of the San Diego Community College District's dual enrollment program and took courses through Miramar College while still in high school.

"I realize now how lucky I was when I was going to Miramar College," she said. "You get the same experience you would at a four-year university, but at a lot less cost."



# SUPPORTING OUR NURSES

Making her way from the South Side of Chicago, Dr. Dometrives “Dee” Armstrong began her nursing career in San Diego, saying she owes her success to the amazing role models and mentors in her life.

“I started my career at City College in 2000 as an adjunct professor in the nursing program,” said Armstrong, who graduated from San Diego City College in 1993 and went on to earn her bachelor’s degree from University of Phoenix, master’s degree from University of San Diego, and doctorate from Walden University. “I am so fortunate to have had strong and supportive parents and family members growing up and amazing mentors throughout my career.”

Armstrong was promoted to Associate Dean in July and now oversees the Nursing Program. In 2020, the program graduated 54 nursing students with 52 students passing the National Council Licensure Exam for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN) and two students pending results. In 2021, the program graduated 60 students on time — while in the midst of a pandemic — with their NCLEX-RN results pending.

With an extensive background in healthcare before landing at City College, Armstrong worked as a nursing assistant at Sharp Memorial Hospital, and she currently

is working per diem at Interim Healthcare San Diego Hospice as a hospice nurse practitioner.

“Working at San Diego Hospice is a great way for me to keep my nursing skills up,” Armstrong said. “I’ve also learned a lot about hospice regulations and policies which makes me a better advocate for other patients and especially for my dad who was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s.”

Armstrong continues to give back to her students and the community.

“I look at my position as a positive role model,” said Armstrong, who is a collaborative partner with the UC San Diego Diversity, Recruit and Retain, Equity, Aspire, and Mentor Externship for underrepresented minority nursing students, as well as an online volunteer mentor with UStrive, an organization that connects professionals with high school students. “I’m giving guidance and support to future nursing students and I’m doing my part to bring more diversity in the nursing field.”

Nursing skills and many other health care services are much needed during the pandemic. To help students keep up their skills, in the spring, the City College Nursing program partnered with the Museum of Us, where 35 students received clinical hours for administering COVID-19 vaccines to the public.



**DR. ARMSTRONG (LEFT)** with a graduating nursing student at the 2021 Nurses Pinning Ceremony drive-thru event.



# EMPATHY, OUTREACH LEAD TO NATIONAL TUTOR OF THE YEAR



Mesa College student Raine Porter is the newest recipient of the College Reading and Learning Association's (CRLA) 2021 Outstanding Tutor Award. The award, established in 1995 by CRLA's International Tutor Training Program Certification (ITTPC) committee which reviews more than 1,200 certified programs, is given annually to one undergraduate tutor who contributes to the academic success of

peers. CRLA felt that Porter was a, "true representative of what an outstanding tutor should be," motivating and inspiring others through her passion and dedication to her work.

In her winning application, Porter wrote about transitioning to remote learning and how the pandemic impacted her approach to online tutoring. She explained, "The idea of 'meeting the student where they are' — and indicating that we understand what they are feeling — facilitated my ability to connect with students despite being in an online space."

Porter credits the Mesa Tutoring and Computing Center (MT2C) with helping her adjust to online tutoring. MT2C serves thousands of students each year, and staff put time and effort into training tutors like Porter to meet the diverse and changing needs of her peers.

"The training sessions that impacted me most were the ones centered around

empathy and student outreach. These two aspects helped me discern when students' frustrations were related to educational content or having to learn in a new online environment," Porter noted.

Above all, Porter sought to form compassionate relationships with the students she tutored in order to inspire their persistence and sense of belonging. "I found that students are more open to seeking assistance when they form interpersonal connections," she said.

Porter has been a tutor at Mesa College for just over two years. A native of Okinawa, Japan, her family moved to San Diego when her father got stationed here as a Marine. Upon enrolling at Mesa College, she would go to the STEM Center to study and, ultimately, she remembers feeling compelled to assist other students with their schoolwork.

According to her supervisors, Porter is the embodiment of the ideal tutor because she has improved in all areas related to the task: tutoring, leadership, andragogy, and equity. Porter has thrived as a mentor tutor, embedded tutor, chemistry tutor, and leader.

"Anyone who has ever interacted with Raine as a colleague, tutor, or friend knows what an amazing human being she is... and how well deserved this prestigious honor is," MT2C Program Coordinator Mark Manasse said.

Porter said that the tutoring training and the strategies she has developed while connecting with Mesa College students will prepare her as she pursues a career as a community college chemistry professor.

"As I continue to learn and prepare for my future goal, I am now confident that I will be equipped with the knowledge to support students with equitable practices," she said.



## A TEAM EFFORT TO STRENGTHEN STUDENT SUPPORT

Miramar College is taking teamwork to a new level when it comes to the San Diego Promise, and Miramar College alumni are playing a major role.

Intent on further involving Promise students with countless possibilities for growth, Miramar College recently held a pair of well-attended webinars introducing students to opportunities available in the Honors Program, the Preparing Accomplished Transfers to the Humanities (PATH) collaboration with UC San Diego, and more. The events, which organizers are aiming to become regularly scheduled symposiums, included Miramar College alumni who shared their experiences and answered questions from new and current students.

“Everyone at Miramar College is working super hard on the San Diego Promise, everyone is working super hard on the PATH Program, and everyone is working super hard on the Honors Program, but instead of engaging in the ‘silo effect,’ we decided to come together to work super hard for all our students and show them the opportunities and support services that are here,” said Miramar College Honors Program Coordinator Carmen Carrasquillo. “It’s about working together in planting new seeds in outreach, recruitment, and support.”

Among the highlights, Carrasquillo said, were Miramar College alumni who raved about the abundance of programs that can help define a student’s future. This included Kelly Clemen, a McNair Scholar at UCSD

majoring in literature who has been accepted with a full scholarship to several doctoral programs, and Franco Vargas Gonzalez, a UCSD literature major planning to teach high school English. Both Clemen and Gonzalez were PATH Program Peer Mentees before transferring successfully to UCSD.

Other speakers included PATH Project Assistant Niyatt Mengiss; Promise outreach ambassadors and event co-coordinators Brittany Price and Aira Aquino; Carrasquillo; and Honors Program Professor Kirk Webley.

“Some of what we shared about honors involved what being an honors student is all about; having an experience that offers a flexible and accessible curriculum emphasizing equity and social justice,” Carrasquillo said. “The honors experience is about mentorship and support from dedicated faculty. Honors can enrich the college-going experience through opportunities to connect with others via smaller class sizes, leadership development through membership in Phi Theta Kappa, access to scholarships, and presentation opportunities at research conferences.”

The conference’s impact was immediate. Several attendees applied to become members in Beta Iota Lambda, the Miramar College chapter of Phi Theta Kappa. Others further inquired about the PATH program, especially the highly successful Peer Mentee opportunity.



CARMEN CARRASQUILLO



KELLY CLEMEN



NIYATT MENGISS



FRANCO VARGAS GONZALEZ

“... we decided to come together to work super hard for all our students and show them the opportunities and support services that are here.”

— Carmen Carrasquillo, Miramar College Honors Program Coordinator



# EMERITUS PROGRAMS KEEP STUDENTS CONNECTED

Older adult students took to art classes offered through San Diego College of Continuing Education's (SDCCE's) free Emeritus programs to cope with the lack of socialization caused by the coronavirus pandemic. The courses allowed art scholars to engage virtually as they learned traditional and modern art techniques and styles from award-winning artist and faculty member Remi Dalton.

"Art is a powerful way to stay connected," said Dalton in response to the COVID-19 campus closures that began in spring 2020. "Many students are making creative spaces in their homes amid the quarantine."

SDCCE's Emeritus program offers classes for students aged 50 and older. Dalton teaches drawing, painting, and art appreciation. Her students are able to journey through virtual tours inside the studios of San Diego's modern working artists, and, after, engage in lecture-discussion on intergenerational sculptors, photographers, poets, and printmakers from Swedish-born American sculptor Claes Oldenburg to American artists Jean-Michel Basquiat and Helen Frankenthaler.

For retired students, Kris Nelson, 70, and Joan Stevens, 82, SDCCE's Emeritus programs mean more than just finding a new hobby.

"If I didn't have any people to talk about art with, I would feel isolated," said Nelson. The Emeritus classes provide healing through her husband's passing and the unforeseen challenges of isolation due to the COVID-19 crisis.

Nelson graduated from San Diego State University in 1972 majoring in art, journalism, and marketing. After her time at SDSU, she began painting African-American musicians from the Jazz Age on furniture that she sold in Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, and Berkeley. Once retired from marketing and graphic design in 1998, she was in search of technique classes to pick up her paintbrush once again.

With a long commute from Oceanside, Nelson felt



removed from the local art community she had found in the Gaslamp Quarter. "When artists come together it inspires you," she said. After enrolling in SDCCE's online art program, Nelson went into her studio and started painting for the first time in two years.

Fellow student Stevens moved to San Diego from Brooklyn, New York, where she began her career in 1959, at age 20, as a kindergarten teacher.

"Growing up there were not many jobs for women," she said. "My parents encouraged me to become an educator. They were right; it was a wonderful profession for me."

Following 40 years working at an elementary school, the then 64-year-old Stevens spent a lot of time thinking about what to do during retirement. She first enrolled in a music appreciation course at SDCCE and since then for nearly 20 years has filled her days with music, art, literature, and brain fitness classes. "I am so inspired by the intellect and humor of the people at SDCCE," Stevens said. "This community keeps me going. I plan to take classes for as long as I can."

From nutrition to arts, retirement, and more, SDCCE's Emeritus program offers hundreds of free classes specifically designed to support older adults maintain independence, rejoin the workforce, and actively engage in the community.

**REMI DALTON, MFA,** is an Emeritus program faculty member at SDCCE. Dalton has been featured as an Artist-in-Residence at Flux Factory in Queens, New York, and was named the NTC Foundation's Emerging Artist Residency winner, permitting her to open a studio inside Liberty Station's Arts District.

# BOUNCING BACK at MESA COLLEGE

**W**hen talking about his journey after high school graduation, Jahloni Mitchell will be the first to admit it has been anything but smooth. When he started community college in fall 2017 at the age of 17, Mitchell quickly found himself on academic probation and a redshirt player on the men's basketball team. "I hit a brick wall," he recalled. "I felt like I was doing everything on my own, and I didn't take things seriously enough." After a series of events and not being able to find his footing, Mitchell set out on a new path. He transferred to Mesa College in fall 2019, and, with the help of men's basketball Head Coach Travis Nichols and Assistant Coach Talib Mahdi, sundry student services programs, and working with the Disability Support Programs and Services (DSPS) office, Mitchell went on to complete that first semester with a 3.3 GPA. "As a staff, the joy we have in seeing him have success in the classroom is extremely satisfying, because we know the barriers he had to overcome," Mahdi said. Not too long after Mitchell's first season with Mesa College wrapped up, the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Life as a student-athlete changed dramatically with classes moving online and his sophomore season cancelled, but Mitchell persevered. With Excellence recently talked with 21-year-old Mitchell about his successes on and off the court, the support he found at Mesa College, and what he's most looking forward to in the upcoming year.

**Q** What kind of support have you received while at Mesa College?

**A** The coaches are on their phones around the clock. There is endless support. There's tough love sometimes, but always love. To get me comfortable at school, the coaches supported me in picking classes. The coaches showed me around to all the support services available to me, and since then it's only been up from there. I got all the help I needed at Mesa.

**Q** How do you define success on and off the basketball court?

**A** Success on the court is seriously what you make it; hard work pays off. That's a cliché answer, but it is the truth. If you put in the minimal amount of work, you'll get minimal results. If you stick to your craft and grind daily, you're going to be successful. Being successful in the classroom means taking it seriously. Being successful is knowing what you want to do and attacking it — go at it 100%.

**Q** What are you most looking forward to in the upcoming year?

**A** This season I'm looking to go as far as we can. In our last season we fell a little short in a few things, including expectations of my own game. The last season was a rollercoaster for me, and I'm looking to make a total 360-degree turn. I think we can make something happen this season and go as far as we can. I'm very excited about this team.



**Q** What's next for you after Mesa College?

**A** Ideally I'd love to transfer to the University of Hawaii; my goal is to get an athletic scholarship. I feel like I could really be an impact player there. If not Hawaii, then I'd like to go to San Diego State, where both my dad and grandfather went, or possibly Fresno State or Cal State Fullerton. I am studying kinesiology and would eventually like to be a personal trainer, an athletic trainer, or possibly get a teaching credential to become a coach and teach PE. Hopefully something that can keep me close to basketball.



SAN DIEGO COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT



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We want to extend our gratitude to the entire SDCCD community for supporting the San Diego Promise program. The San Diego Promise gives our students access to education and hope for a better tomorrow.

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