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SMC Receives \$1.6 Million to Prepare Students for Information & Communication Technology Careers

Santa Monica College was awarded \$1.6 million from the California Department of Education’s California Career Pathway Trust Grant. SMC is part of a larger educational and industry consortium called “LA HI-TECH” which received a total of \$15 million over three years to collaborate in preparing students for careers in the emerging field of Information and Communications Technology (ICT).

“We will not only be filling a skills gap in the industry, we will also be helping to address the achievement gap; a persistent disparity in student success...more students from low income and diverse backgrounds will be able to rise into the middle class through access to these jobs,” says Frank Dawson, Acting Associate Dean of Career Technical Education at SMC.



The ICT industry brings in about \$73 billion in sales revenue for Los Angeles and Orange County and employs over one million Californians, and includes occupations such as software developer, web designer, database administrator, electrical engineer, graphic designer, writer, producer, director, animator, mobile app developer.

Conversations initiated by SMC President Dr. Chui L. Tsang led to the development of EMERGE, an interdisciplinary concept at SMC to align instruction in the areas of Information, Communication, Technology, Entertainment and Entrepreneurship to meet the needs of the vibrant tech-based industry in Los Angeles’s Westside referred to as “Silicon Beach”. The EMERGE concept and the successful Promo Pathway program model at SMC were instrumental in the formation of the eight-college, 29-high school alliance with community and industry

partners.

“The whole purpose of this grant is to create economic impact,” says Dr. Patricia Ramos, SMC Dean of Workforce and Economic Development. An executive council composed of all the college presidents and the high school principals involved will work towards removing educational policy barriers to support the development of these “career pathways” for students to segue from high school to college and into these ICT jobs.

“Hopefully, this will make the transition from high school to college easier for students,” says William Lancaster, who teaches graphic design at SMC. Lancaster and his colleagues in other departments will be collaborating with high school partners to link curriculum in areas such as Design Visual Media Arts and Information Services and Support Design.

“The CSIS department realizes the challenges of teaching computer science curriculum at the high school campuses,” says Fariba Bolandhemat, SMC’s department chair of computer science and information systems. “To address these challenges, we envision the use of innovative digital educational tools like Whiteboard to bring the college campus to the high school student.”

SMC and its partners plan on developing dual enrollment courses that prepare students for college-level work, transition services such as summer bridge programs, mentorships, tutoring and counseling support services. Over 800 annual internships and “job-shadowing” opportunities with industry partners are planned for students in the ICT plan of study, which will start in ninth grade.

SMC’s design technology department -which includes the graphic design program - has already been training ICT students. New courses in mobile and user experience design were recently developed to meet industry needs.

“The long-term impact of participating in LA Hi-Tech will be an increase in the number of students finishing and getting degrees and certificates,” says Chris Fria, SMC Design Technology Department Chair. “Since students will be able to get a head start on our curriculum while still in high school, they will be better equipped to complete our programs at SMC.”

About 4,700 of the 10,000 jobs that need to be filled in the ICT industry are “middle-skill” jobs -meaning that they require an associate degree, certificate of achievement or some level of two-year, post-secondary training. SMC and its partners aim at filling over a quarter of these jobs by training students and in so doing, fill the industry’s skills gap, namely, a lack of local and diverse talent.

SMC is the leader for the “west region” hub - the Los Angeles consortium is divided into four hubs - and its community college partner is West Los Angeles College; high school partners include Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District and Los Angeles Unified School District; other partners include California State Universities, Los Angeles; Dominguez Hills and Northridge; the cities of Santa Monica and Los Angeles, and businesses such as Amazon Web Services, HBO West Coast Production, Sony Pictures, 3S Global Solutions, etc. Pasadena Area Community College serves as the fiscal lead for the grant.

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(Labor data related to the ICT industry and quoted in this article is from a 2014 study conducted by Economic Modeling Specialists International).