

Building Careers, Fueling Industries: The Women Transforming Workforce Education in San Diego & Imperial Counties

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A wave of innovation is reshaping the future of workforce education across San Diego and Imperial Counties community colleges, led by the inspiring women at the helm. These leaders, together with the San Diego & Imperial Counties Regional Consortium, are driving forward-thinking programs that blend innovation, industry collaboration and hands-on training to equip students for high-demand careers. From biotechnology labs pioneering life-saving advancements to state-of-the-art welding facilities forging the next generation of skilled tradespeople, to sustainable fashion studios revolutionizing textile production, these campuses are redefining what it means to prepare students for the workforce of the future.

MiraCosta College: Where Apprenticeships Deliver Opportunity

When MiraCosta College Superintendent/President, Dr. Sunita “Sunny” Cooke, envisions workforce education, she sees a future where students don’t just learn—they launch careers. At MiraCosta College, that future is already here. Thanks to \$3.6 million in new grant funding, the college has expanded apprenticeships in IT, digital marketing, life sciences and healthcare, giving students a direct path to real-world experience and paid opportunities.

MiraCosta is also home to the nation’s first community college biomanufacturing bachelor’s degree program. This groundbreaking initiative, supported in part by Strong Workforce Program (SWP) funds, is preparing students for in-demand careers in the biotech industry. With nearly 100 alumni employed at 60 companies, the program has doubled in capacity, leading to the construction of a state-of-the-art biotech facility with advanced chemistry and biochemistry labs.

“At MiraCosta College, we are not just preparing students for the workforce; we are transforming lives through education,” said Dr. Sunny Cooke MiraCosta College Superintendent/President. “Our apprenticeship programs and biomanufacturing degree provide tangible pathways to success.”

San Diego College of Continuing Education: Innovation Through Hands-On Training

At San Diego College of Continuing Education (SDCCE), President Dr. Tina King is proving that workforce training can be both cutting-edge and accessible. With \$1.175 million in U.S. Navy funding secured in collaboration with the SDI RC, SDCCE is doubling the size of its award-winning welding program, providing more students with the skills to secure high-paying jobs in shipbuilding and the maritime industry.

Beyond welding, SDCCE is leading the way in sustainable fashion and automation. Launched in fall 2024, the Automation, Innovation, Robotics (A.I.R.) Skills Technical Trades and Workforce Development Center introduced students to sustainable textile production, industrial sewing and digital manufacturing. This hands-on learning with industrial-scale digital printing, embroidery and pattern-making tools ensures students are career-ready in industries that are evolving rapidly.

“At SDCCE, we are shaping the workforce of tomorrow by equipping students with industry-relevant skills,” said Dr. Tina King, President of San Diego College for Continuing Education. “Whether in welding or sustainable fashion, our programs are built for real-world impact.”

Building the Workforce of Tomorrow

As we celebrate Women’s History Month, we recognize the remarkable leadership of our women presidents across six of our 10 regional community colleges. Their vision extends beyond their campuses, transforming industries, fueling local economies and creating life-changing opportunities for students. Together with SDI RC’s advocacy and support, our community colleges will continue to prepare students for the jobs of today and tomorrow while building a more inclusive, skilled and future-ready workforce for San Diego and Imperial Counties for generations to come.

