

Community colleges turn on learning with technology

By **Kim Hoffmans**
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The global pandemic has created one of the grandest shifts imaginable in how we work and learn. It has also forever changed the way companies and institutions operate, as more hybrid and remote options are being offered than ever before. This shift parallels what's happening in higher education as institutions view technologies as a new frontier to drive education forward.

At Ventura College, technology is central to our online learning courses and cutting-edge, immersive training for health-care students simulates real-world experiences.

Before the pandemic, many colleges and universities offered a selection of courses that included online and hybrid formats but focused the majority of their course offerings on traditional classroom instruction.

Everything changed when the pandemic lockdown began mid-semester in spring 2020, as few institutions were prepared to immediately segue to a fully online and remote format.

The required speed of the transition resulted in a system-wide frustration from faculty who were unprepared to make this instant pedagogy shift and students who were on the receiving end of this sharp learning curve.

Jennifer Kalfsbeek-Goetz, Ventura College's vice president for academic affairs and student learning, recognized this shift as an opportunity to increase quality instruction for students. She spearheaded the college's push



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to become a certified campus for Peer Online Course Review (POCR).

POCR is a program that reviews and aligns online courses to California's highest standard of excellence for online instruction, the California Virtual Campus-Online Education Initiative (CVC-OEI) Course Design Rubric. Based on decades of research and data-driven standards, the rubric is a roadmap for designing online courses to support student success developed by the California Virtual Campus (CVC) and the state's Online Education Initiative.

Kalfsbeek-Goetz mobilized Ventura College's distance education staff — including Matt Moore, Sharon Oxford and Ali-Olson Pacheco, and faculty lead Meg Phelps — to develop a local POCR program with faculty reviewing and supporting their peers in leveling up course design to align with the rigorous standards of the CVC-OEI Rubric.

As a result of the team's

effort and the high quality of the courses reviewed through the VC POCR process, CVC certified Ventura College to function as a fully independent review program. The college was fully certified in its first round of applications, which is difficult to do.

Moorpark College and Oxnard College also have POCR teams to review online courses at their campuses.

As a result, students searching for courses in the California Community Colleges' California Virtual Campus course exchange system will see a "Quality Reviewed" digital badge, making it easier for them to find the best offerings at the Ventura County Community College District.

Technological enhancements to online instruction have been crucial in elevating the digital experience, which has resulted in a more positive learning outcome. Students in the Ventura County Community College District demand and deserve high-quality education delivered in multiple formats of in-person and online instruction to integrate into their busy schedules.

The next technological frontier arrived on campus this spring in the form of hands-on learning labs.

Ventura College added PRISM, an integrated hardware and software product that combines high-resolution surround projection with directional sound and touch interactivity to add lifelike contextual stimuli to learning environments. Meaning PRISM completely transformed the college's

approach to learning by providing immersive technology for Ventura College's paramedic studies and emergency medical technician lab.

WorldViz, the Santa Barbara-based company behind PRISM, also works with NASA and Stanford University. Peter Schlueer, WorldViz president, says the company is on a mission to use immersive technology to enhance how people create, learn and collaborate.

The paramedic program leadership notes that elevating stress during training improves learning outcomes and paramedic preparedness. Using PRISM to create hazardous or otherwise difficult-to-recreate scenarios evokes a sense of presence in scenario training and improves learner engagement.

Oxnard College will soon add a PRISM immersive theater to its EMT lab. Moorpark College's biotechnology program offers a comprehensive curriculum in bio-manufacturing that includes hands-on learning in a state-of-the-art biotech lab.

As president of Ventura College, I am confident that the ability to provide these cutting-edge solutions to our students will serve them well and apply directly to their professional lives after college. Ventura County's community colleges will continue to implement strategies to elevate learning for all and improve student learning and outcomes as we navigate the new normal.

— *Kimberly Hoffmans, R.N., Ed.D., is president of Ventura College.*



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