



PHOTOS BY DREW A. KELLEY, CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

Victor Gutierrez, right, and Michelle Samura, dean of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, discuss his piece, "El Amor Es," on Nov. 7 during the Encore! concert.

MUSIC

SCC ALUMNUS RETURNS TO HEAR HIS MUSIC PERFORMED AT FALL CONCERT

Victor Guiterrez honored at Encore! performance

By **Jenelyn Russo**
contributing writer

Santiago Canyon College's Fall Concert, held Nov. 7, was a night of music and celebration, highlighted by a special tribute to SCC alumnus and New York-based composer Victor Gutierrez, whose inspiring journey from student to musician was honored at the event.

Titled "Encore! Honoring our Past and Composing our Future," the performance was held in the Lorenzo A. Ramirez Library on campus, where one upstairs wing was transformed into a concert hall for the night. The evening began with a VIP & President's Circle Reception that featured the school's Ballet Folklórico dance group, as well as the SCC Community Jazz Band.

The concert included performances by the SCC Choral & Community Choir,

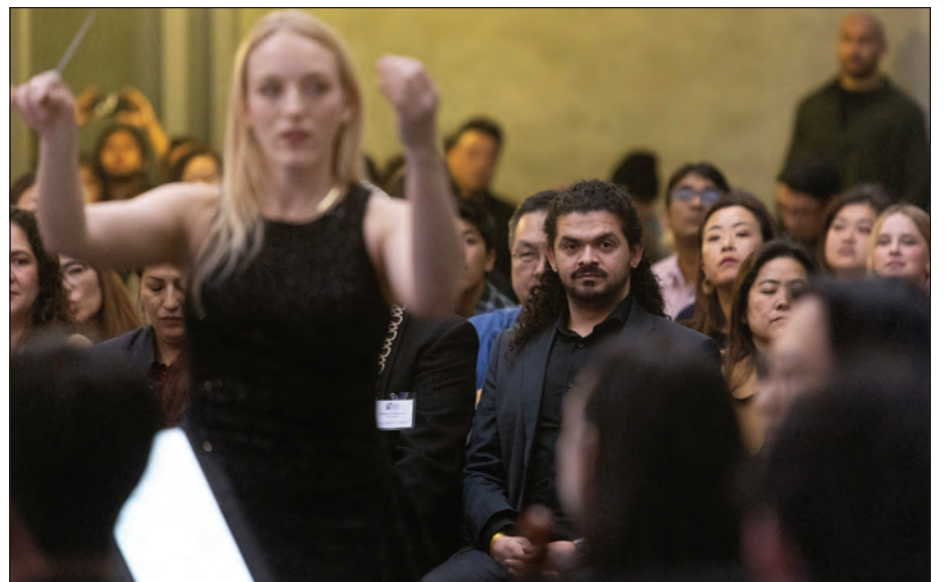
as well as Canyon High School Orchestra and El Rancho Middle School Orchestra. Additionally, SCC faculty were featured throughout the event, contributing as soloists and accompaniment.

"It's a celebration of the college and the community," said Eleanor Nunez-Mason, co-chair of SCC's Performing Arts Department. "We have a celebration of a little bit of Mexican music and Hispanic heritage as well."

Spotlighted at the event was Victor Gutierrez, an SCC alumnus and composer who got his start in music as an elementary student when he learned to play the flute. While at Canyon High School, he added the oboe to his repertoire and moved quickly up the ranks, becoming the principal oboist for the school's orchestra and a member of the Irvine Classical Players Orchestra.

Following high school graduation in 2015, and unsure of his next steps,

CONCERT » PAGE 3



Victor Gutierrez, right, listens while Eleanor Nuñez-Mason conducts a performance of his composition, "El Amor Es."



PHOTO COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS
Students refer to the initial question in crafting their AI prompts.

TECHNOLOGY

Prompt-A-Thon competition showcases the power of AI

Writing to develop artificial intelligence

By **Larry Urish**
contributing writer

Since the dawn of the Industrial Age, technical improvements have been enabled through the work of experts in their respective fields. Automotive technology, for example, advanced thanks to the efforts of engineers and mechanics well-versed in their specialty. So one would expect the growth of artificial intelligence to be spearheaded by top data scientists and software engineers, people with years of experience at the cutting-edge of digital technology.

However, this is not the case, said

Roger Lloyd, director of the Orange County / Inland Empire Small Business Development Center's Marketing Center. "People think AI equals IT, but that's not really true," he said. "While the technical aspect does involve data scientists building language models, for the general use of AI for human productivity and improvement, anyone — regardless of age, background or education level — can use it."

Sharing the widespread accessibility and benefit of artificial intelligence was one key element behind the inaugural Orange County Artificial Intelligence Prompt-a-Thon, an AI-prompt-writing competition hosted by Santiago Canyon College on Tues-

PROMPT-A-THON » PAGE 5

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RECOGNITION

Two standouts cited for their service by district

RSCCD Communications

During the regularly scheduled board of trustees meeting on Nov. 12, the Rancho Santiago Community College District celebrated Veterans Day by honoring two outstanding student veterans: Adan Salvador from Santa Ana College and Jorge Ayala Tapia from Santiago Canyon College. This recognition aimed to highlight the individual achievements of these two veterans and acknowledge the sacrifices and perseverance of all veterans attending the Rancho Santiago Community College District.

Journey to engineering

Adan Salvador served six years in the U.S. Army as a 19 Delta Cavalry Scout, where he demonstrated commitment, resilience, and leadership in roles such as training lieutenants at Camp Hovey in South Korea. Following his service, Adan transitioned to civilian life and is now pursuing an associate of arts in mechanical engineering at Santa Ana College, with a commendable GPA of 3.65. His academic success is complemented by his active involvement in various student organizations, including the Veterans Student Association and the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, where he advocates for veteran support on campus.

Outside his academic and extracurricular commitments, he treasures time with his daughter and enjoys soccer, fishing, and basketball. He says he is grateful for the Veterans Resource Center's help, which he credits for smoothing his path back into education. Adan's goal is to continue his engineering studies at Cal Poly Pomona in Fall 2025.

Environmental science

Jorge Ayala Tapia's journey began in Napa Valley where he enlisted in the Marine Corps in 2016. His service took him from Camp Pendleton to Japan and Australia with the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit. After completing his Marine Corps service in 2020, Jorge faced the challenges of civilian life. He was re-enlisted in the Army as an infantry team leader, serving until he transitioned to Santiago Canyon College.

Currently, Jorge is studying environmental science at Santiago Canyon College, where he feels he has found a new purpose and stability. He is a committed family man and actively engages with the campus's Veterans Resource Center. Jorge credits the VRC staff for helping him transition smoothly to academic life, providing admissions assistance and tutoring support to ensure his success. "The VRC made it easy for me to transition from soldier to full-time student," Jorge said.




PHOTOS COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS

Jorge Tapia, who served in the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit, is studying environmental science at Santiago Canyon College.



Adan Salvador, formerly a 19 Delta Cavalry Scout, is pursuing an associate's degree in mechanical engineering.



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PHOTOS BY DREW A. KELLEY, CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

Lee Lee Truong-Sawicki, who has worked alongside SCC's faculty and staff for more than a decade, conducts a piece during the concert.

Concert

FROM PAGE 1

Gutierrez enrolled at SCC. Although the campus did not offer a music program, he pursued psychology while taking music courses at Santa Ana College. His passion for music remained strong, but it was his deep dive into psychology that unlocked his gift as a composer.

"Through SCC, I learned a lot about the brain, the pillars of behavior and how that relates to our development, and that has turned into the cornerstone of my compositional work," Gutierrez said.

Along his education journey, Gutierrez learned he has synesthesia, a neurological condition that causes people to experience one sense through another. As a result, the young composer does a lot of "mindful writing" of what he sees and hears.

"I feel like my duty as a composer, especially with the gift that I have, is how can I take what I have in my head and translate that into a piece for the performers to perform so that the audience can experience that same emotion," Gutierrez said.

After leaving SCC, Gutierrez transferred into Cal State Fullerton's music composition program and began to take composing seriously, so much so that upon graduating CSUF in 2021, he headed to New York University on scholarship and completed his master's degree in music theory and composition in 2023.

"New York has always been a dream, a far-fetched dream that I thought I couldn't reach," Gutierrez said. "But when I got that acceptance letter, it was like fate. I had to go, and there was nothing stopping me from going to NYU."

Now based in New York, Gutierrez works as a freelance composer, audio engineer and producer, with expertise in film scores, concert compositions and musical theater. During his time in the music program at CSUF, he crossed paths with Nunez-Mason, who recently reached out to her former classmate to compose a special piece for SCC's Fall Concert.

"El Amor Es," original music that Gutierrez composed as part of his graduate thesis, is a semi-autobiographical work that pays respect to mariachi music and Mexican family culture. After being contacted by Nunez-Mason, he rearranged the piece for an orchestra, incorporating mariachi themes with vocals, resulting in a composition that reflects the duality of hope and sorrow alongside loss to love.

Back in California for the first time since he moved to New York, Gutierrez was honored at SCC's Fall Concert where he experienced hearing his piece performed live, a full-circle moment for the alum. Having once been a student and orchestra member at both Canyon High School and El Rancho Middle School, the hometown composer was excited to see the students perform and to share insights from his educational path during the President's Reception.

"Going to a community college allowed me the freedom to explore," Gutierrez said. "It allowed me the freedom

to question and even fail on some things."

Although not an option at the time Gutierrez was a student, SCC will be offering a new associates of arts degree in music beginning in fall 2025, designed for transfer to CSU or UC four-year music programs. Nunez-Mason is currently writing the curriculum and is excited to bring this new opportunity to life.

"We are artists," Nunez-Mason said. "We respond to the community, and we're also contributing to future generations and paving the path for them."

The evening not only celebrated Gutierrez and his accomplishments but also highlighted the powerful role of art in education and its impact on the community.

"SCC has been a huge cornerstone in my foundation as a composer," Gutierrez said. "I'm eternally grateful for them."



College President Jeannie Kim speaks Nov. 7 at the fall Encore! event.

MUSIC

Santiago Canyon College's 'Encore' includes, entertains community

RSCCD Communications

The 2024 Santiago Canyon College Fall Concert "Encore," hosted by the Santiago Canyon College Foundation and the Performing Arts Department drew a standing room only crowd of more than 200 on Nov. 7.

The concert was held on the second floor of the Lorenzo A. Ramirez Library.

"We're in this space because of the beautiful acoustics," said SCC Performing Arts Department co-chair Eleanor Nunez-Mason. "It allows us to show off one of the absolute gems of SCC."

The concert showcased the talents of the SCC Chorale and Community Choir, Canyon High School Orchestra, El Rancho Charter Middle School Orchestra and the SCC Community Jazz Band.

Santiago Canyon College alumnus and composer Victor Gutierrez was honored during the performance. His "El Amor Es," featuring soloist SCC professor Jane Kim, was performed.

Roberto Velazquez received the 2024 SCC Performing Arts Community Partner Award for his contributions to the folklorico arts in the community and at SCC.



Victor Gutierrez returned to Santiago Canyon to be honored and have his work performed.

FINANCIAL AID

SCC research scholars earn scholarships to further their education

3 students plan careers in STEM

By Lou Ponsi
contributing writer

Students from underrepresented backgrounds are often confronted by limited resources and opportunities when pursuing careers in STEM fields.

According to Pew Research Center, despite Hispanics making up to 17% of the total workforce, only 8% of Hispanics are in the STEM fields, and only 3% of these are females in STEM.

But three Santiago Canyon College students, all women from various Latin backgrounds, applied for and earned scholarships to further their education in STEM, an acronym for Science Technology Engineering and Math.

The three students - Brianna Castellon, Melody Ceme and Luz Campos Vasquez - share another common denominator in addition to gender and ethnicity.

All three were students of SCC chemistry professor Zachary Thammavongsy, who encouraged each of them to apply for STEM-related scholarships and research opportunities.

"All three of them definitely fit the bill for exactly what a research-type student could and should be," Thammavongsy said. "I'm just glad they heeded my advice and applied. What I find really interesting about them is that even though they're doing research, they're doing research in very different fields. They all took chemistry but they span into different fields when they do their research."

While the three students are no longer in Thammavongsy's chemistry classes, they have remained in touch with their former professor, keeping him abreast of their research. Likewise, Thammavongsy has also reached out to his former students for updates.

SCC offers a variety of resources for first-generation students and students from underrepresented backgrounds.

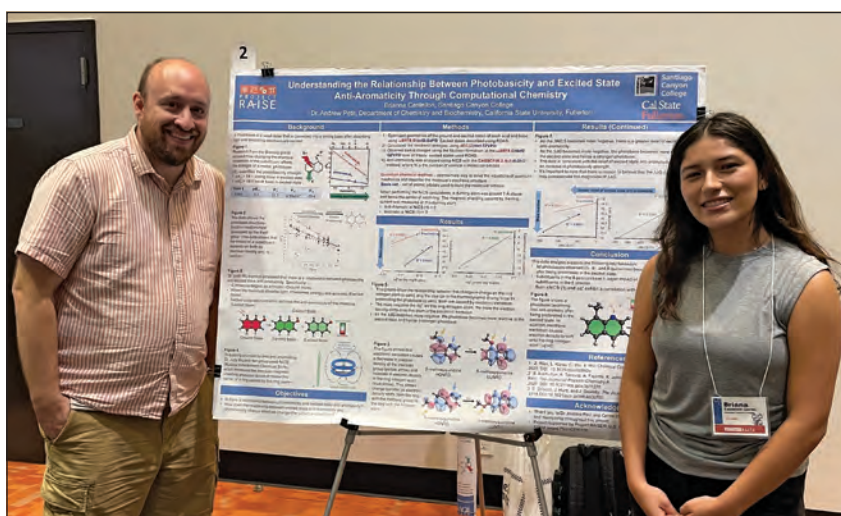
Among them is the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP), a federally funded initiative providing eligible students with academic assistance, career planning services, and educational support.

Luz Campos Vasquez

Campos Vasquez is a 26-year-old first-generation college student who was first drawn to STEM subjects as a freshman in high school.

He mother didn't go to college, and her father didn't finish middle school, said Campos Vasquez, whose parents came to the U.S. from Jalisco, Mexico.

As part of the AVID program, a support program for middle and high school students, Campos Vasquez was asked to choose a career.



PHOTOS COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS
Student Brianna Castellon presents her work with Cal State Fullerton chemistry professor Andrew Petit.



Student Luz Campos Vasquez with Zachary Thammavongsy, chemistry professor at Santiago Canyon College

Campos Vasquez chose mechanical engineering to pay homage to her father, who was an auto mechanic and had recently died.

"And that's how I got into learning more about mechanical engineering," Campos Vasquez said. "I (thought) this is actually really, really cool. And I kind of started just sticking to that kind of path. I'm not going to lie, obviously there was obstacles and imposter syndrome. Am I smart enough for this?"

At SCC, Campos Vasquez found support services for first-generation students and encouragement from Thammavongsy.

She also attends Latinas in Engineering conferences.

Campos Vasquez is currently participating in the NASA Community College Aerospace Scholars (NCAS) program, designed to advance students'

knowledge of STEM and STEM-based fields.

NCAS is a virtual program that task students with completing three missions.

For the first mission, students received an overview of NASA's current operation and plans for the future.

The second mission, which Campos Vasquez recently completed, gives students the opportunity to engage in a simulated mission while learning about NASA's workplace roles.

Next will be Mission 3, which involves two weeks of online preparation followed by one week at a NASA Field Center.

Campos Vasquez and her fellow scholars will participate in STEM-based activities, including an engineering design challenge, subject-matter-expert presentations, a resume workshop and a networking event.

Campos Vasquez plans to graduate from SCC after the Spring 2025 semester and continue her education at Cal Poly Pomona.

Brianna Castellon

As a Project RAISE scholar, Castellon, a first-generation student from Bolivia, had the opportunity to conduct summer research at Cal State Fullerton.

RAISE is an eight-week summer program representing a partnership between Cal State Fullerton and several community colleges in the region.



Student Melody Ceme received a scholarship for her work in organic chemistry.

Under the direction of CSUF chemistry professor Andrew Petit and his graduate student, Castellon used modern computational tools to gain insights into the relationship between a molecule's structure and its photochemical function.

At the conclusion of her summer research project, Castellon presented her findings at Cal State Fullerton in the form of a poster.

Castellon was a student in Thammavongsy's Chemistry 200 class in the Fall 2023 semester and was first drawn to STEM after taking a summer chemistry class at SCC.

Castellon now serves as a chemistry tutor for SCC students.

"There are so many opportunities for first-gen students, and every student should take advantage of them," Castellon said.

Melody Ceme

Ceme has developed a passion for organic chemistry and performed summer research at UC Irvine under the guidance of chemistry professor Sergey Pronin and his graduate student.

The American Chemical Society defines organic chemistry as the study of the structure, properties, composition, reactions and preparation of carbon-containing compounds.

For her research, Ceme used modern computational tools to gain insights into the relationship between a molecule's structure and its photochemical function.

Ceme had firsthand experience using modern organic chemistry instruments to analyze her molecules.

Ceme was Thammavongsy's student in CHEM 280 in the Fall 2023 semester and is now a supplemental instructor, helping to teach other students for an organic chemistry course.

"I know she enjoys organic chemistry very much," Thammavongsy said. "She is always thinking about organic chemistry problems and how to solve them."

Ceme plans to attend UC Irvine and is considering medical school for post-graduate studies.

"She got a lot out of (her research at UC Irvine)," Thammavongsy said. "She still believes, at least from what she told me, that if the medical school doesn't work out, then she will pursue a Ph.D. in chemistry or just in any field of science."

CELEBRATION

SCC honors student vets, community partners to kick off Veterans Week

RSCCD Communications

Santiago Canyon College held a weeklong celebration of veterans from Nov. 4 to 7, honoring those who served in the armed services and their reserve components.

The celebration included 100 American flags adorning light poles or planted throughout the campus, with each flag representing an SCC student veteran, active-duty service member or military family member. Additionally, several student veterans were featured on murals that pictured them in uniform and in their civilian lives.

Festivities for the weeklong celebration began with a ceremony on Nov. 4, recognizing Marine Corps veteran Angel Arancivia for his outstanding achievements and resilience, welcoming 18 student veterans into the SALUTE National Veterans Honor Society, celebrating their academic excellence and commitment and thanking community partner, the Assistance League of Orange for its continuing support of SCC student veterans.

Arancivia served six years in the Marine Corps before entering the civilian workforce. In 2022, he enrolled at Santiago Canyon College to pursue a degree in business administration. During his time at SCC, Arancivia navigated a battle with Stage 3 cancer. He is preparing to transfer to a Cal State or UC to continue his academic journey and received a plaque for his achievements and commitment.

The group of 18 student veterans inducted into the SALUTE National Veterans Honor Society represented the inaugural membership chapter from SCC into the nationwide group, which boast more than 300 chapters.

"Each chapter symbolizes not only the achievements of veterans bettering themselves through the pursuit of knowl-



PHOTOS COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS
Eighteen student veterans were inducted into the SCC chapter of the SALUTE National Veterans Honor Society.



The Assistance League of Orange County was recognized for its support of student veterans.

edge," said TRiO Veterans Program Coordinator Adam McManamy. "But also, our commitment as a group to honor those among us that are the tip of the spear."

Finally, the Assistance League of Or-

ange was honored for its partnership with SCC's Veterans Resource Center in creating programs that provide veterans with household items and educational essentials, as well as holiday celebrations for veterans away from home.



Marine Corps veteran Angel Arancivia

DONOR DRIVE

Campus fundraiser teaches planning, organization, teamwork

Task forces create annual charity event

By Nicole Gregory
contributing writer

On Nov. 25, the annual head-shaving challenge will take place on the Santiago Canyon College campus to raise money for St. Baldrick's Foundation Bone Marrow Donor drive. Since it began 15 years ago, the event has been organized by communications students and has taught them how to produce a large, successful charity fundraiser.

Jared Kubicka-Miller, professor and speech and debate coach in the Department of Communication, started the charity event the semester after his 27-year-old brother, Scott Buehler, died while rescuing a cat from a tall cypress tree in 2008. Always a giving person, according to his friends and family, Scott had shaved his head to help raise money for childhood cancer research through St. Baldrick's Foundation. To honor his brother, Kubicka-Miller created the event on the SCC campus to raise money but also to teach students in his Group Dynamics class how to organize a charity event.

Students in his class have been producing it ever since and have raised more than \$70,000 for the charity.

"In the class we teach how to manage group communication, writing agendas, leadership, conflict resolution and decision-making," he said. "It's really all about event planning and making sure all of the administrative work is met, because St. Baldrick's has certain legal requirements, our campus has certain legal requirements — there are a bunch of moving parts in organizing it."

Classes that teach group dynamics often work on large projects, but the charity element makes this class unique, said Tara Kubicka-Miller, Jared's wife, who is also a professor of communication



PHOTO COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS
Students sign up to have their heads shaved during a St. Baldrick's Foundation fundraiser on campus.

at Santiago Canyon College, as well as chair of the Department of Communication and president of the academic senate. "This is a very skill-based, semester-long project."

The class typically has between 60 and 100 students, and as they begin to plan the event, they break into seven task forces. "We have a task force that is the event planning. We also have a task force that focuses on social media. They learn how to get special access to our accounts and how to monitor the statistics and how to make content," Jared Kubicka-Miller explained. "We have an administrative task force, so people who are business oriented tend to gravitate toward that one."

The event took a different turn in 2014 when Tara Kubicka-Miller received frightening health news. "I was diagnosed with leukemia and ultimately diagnosed with a disease called MDS —

myelodysplastic syndrome," she said, "and was given two to four years to live unless I received a bone marrow transplant."

A donor had to be found who was a perfect DNA match for her marrow. "At the time, there was a group called Be the Match — they changed their name to National Bone Marrow Donor," she said. Anyone can be part of a bone marrow registry by simply donating a swab of saliva taken from the inside of the mouth for a DNA sample. Should a match be needed, that donor will receive a call and arrangements will be made to donate their stem cells; their blood is then rushed to wherever the patient is located.

A young man in Germany turned out to be a perfect DNA match for Tara, and she is healthy and cancer-free today as the result of having the transplant at City of Hope, using his stem cells.

St. Baldrick's Event

10 a.m. – 2 p.m. Nov. 25
Santiago Canyon College
8045 E. Chapman Ave., Orange, CA
For more information or to make a donation, visit the website:
www.stbaldricks.org/events/mypage/2308/2024

This experience inspired Jared Kubicka-Miller to want to raise money for the National Bone Marrow project, and he incorporated that into the annual St. Baldrick's event. As a result, hundreds of people have signed up for the bone marrow registry.

Seeing their hard work result in a meaningful outcome teaches students valuable lessons.

"I love the transition from the first day to the last day because when I hit them with what is going to happen in the course, I know many doubt the success of the event," Jared Kubicka-Miller said. "And then as we go through the process, we get closer, and it just keeps building and the momentum keeps on going, and we face challenges and we get through them. And they see how a dedicated group of people can be successful. I always look forward to that."

Tara Kubicka-Miller sees a valuable life lesson for the students. "It is the perfect example of how your career as an educator is to take this expertise that you have and not just teach people content, but hopefully influence how they're going to live life. This particular course takes our personal story of a lot of loss, a lot of fear and a lot of trauma and uses that as motivation to turn them into other things. I'm hoping when students are presented with really powerful life events, that the experience of what they've learned through Jared and me gets them to keep putting one foot in front of the other and know they can overcome them and do good things."

Prompt-A-Thon

FROM PAGE 1

day. Organized by the local SBDC, the Orange County Regional Consortium, the Anaheim Unified School District and United Way of Orange County, the event featured teams competing to write the most effective AI prompts tackling a variety of topics.

What exactly is an AI prompt? "It's a guided, well-directed sequence of words that educates AI and leads to tailored responses, solutions or answers," said Michael Sacoto, interim executive director of the Orange County Regional Consortium. Prompt writers, he said, engage with AI in what are essentially text-based conversations to find solutions and strategies to all manner of challenges.

"An effective prompt takes into consideration not just the final outcome," said Lloyd, who ran an AI consulting firm from 2015 to 2019. "It involves a prompt's emotional tone and includes many details about the intended recipients — their educational level, for example — to deliver the outcome they want. When done effectively, a prompt can take up to 15 minutes to write."

"Michael and I asked ourselves, 'What if we were to have a competition in a fun environment that showcased prompting as creativity in action?'" Lloyd said. "Our goal was to use this Prompt-a-Thon as a platform to showcase how anyone can use AI at any age, any background or any level of education. It also shows the value of teamwork while furnishing examples of effective versus ineffective prompting, and it illustrates how creative thought is essential in leveraging the value of prompt engineering."

Getting students to understand how to use prompts properly, whether in the classroom or in competitions such as this, helps them build the skills and understanding of this resource that the workforce is going to be asking for very soon," Sacoto said.

The competing students came from the Anaheim Unified School District and Orange County United Way; both organizations recruited and prepped the students, Sacoto said. Pitting one group against another in a 16-team playoff format, each team was given an initial prompt question and had one minute to discuss it. "Then they had three minutes of back-and-forth prompt writing to get as close to a solution as they could," Lloyd said. A panel of six judged their work based on the number of prompts written to solve the problem, the creativity involved and the final outcome. "Seeing the speed of creative thought in action was extremely valuable in a fun learning environment like this."

Members of the winning team, from Kennedy High School and the Kennedy Institute of Technology & Engineering, were Michael Clavio and Jaden Baena.

An example of an initial prompt question is as follows: You're tasked with organizing a school spirit event in Orange, CA, where the high school graduation rate is 88% and school pride runs high. Describe what the event would include and how you'd make it inclusive and engaging for



PHOTOS COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS
Teams from the Anaheim Unified School District and OC United Way competed at the inaugural Prompt-A-Thon at Santiago Canyon College.



Competitors of the two top teams shake hands at the conclusion of the event.

students from all grades. A few hints to guide the competitors, Lloyd said, would include the school's graduation rate and level of school spirit. "We wanted them to leverage these in the prompt-writing process."

Both teams going head-to-head in a given round were separated so they couldn't see each other's prompts, while the audience viewed large screens as they watched the fast-paced competition unfold.

While noting the input from the SBDC, Lloyd praised the OC Regional Consortium, Anaheim Unified School District and OC United Way for their critical efforts in organizing the competition, and he applauded Santiago Canyon College for hosting the event.

The next Prompt-a-Thon will take place on Dec. 12 at Santa Ana College. As for future competitions, "Roger and I would like to expand it to non-students," Sacoto said. "For example, we have an idea to open up a Prompt-a-Thon to older adults. ... And we'd like to thank our leadership for giving us the blessings to organize something like this."



The next Prompt-A-Thon will take place next month. Organizers plan to open the competition to non-students in the future.

VIDEO GAMES

‘Traditional’ athletes in the competitive world of esports

Interest in program growing, director says

By Brian Robin
contributing writer

First off, these are not your typical athletes, by whatever means you define “typical.” There are no budding edge rushers, point guards or center defenders in the images your mind conjures up of those positions at this moment.

But when you burrow down into Roshan Uma’s team here at Santiago Community College, there are edge rushers. There are point guards and yes, there are center defenders. They don’t go by those names, naturally. But Uma has at his disposal athletes — and yes, they are athletes — who function in those positions.

They just do it in front of a computer, playing PC games like League of Legends, Overwatch 2 and Valorant.

Uma is the director of esports at SCC, overseeing an up-and-coming program that in its young, less-than-a-year-old existence, has become one of the more popular organizations on campus. The Hawks already boast a 20-person esports team, with another 20-30 serving as coaches, assistant coaches, analysts and team managers — all of whom possess savant-like knowledge of the games they play, coach and analyze.

That’s just the competitive element. Uma said on the community end — an end he’s passionate about discussing — SCC will routinely bring out upwards of 150 students who participate in events ranging from campus socials and meetings with veteran’s groups to community parades. For this year’s Orange Chamber of Commerce May Parade, the team built floats based on various “Star Wars” vehicles.

How else would you celebrate May the 4th?

“Instead of keeping things internally, I spread the love,” said the ebullient and outgoing Uma, who came over from Norco College in February to start SCC’s program.

And when you hear Uma “spread the love” about esports, it’s not hard to imagine that he should add “ambassador” to his list of titles that — besides SCC’s director of esports — includes his day job of executive producer for video game producer Broken Circle Studios and founder of the California Collegiate Esports League, a nonprofit foundation



PHOTO COURTESY OF ROSHAN UMA AND JOHNNY VO
The SCC esports team, clockwise from top left: Zayd Abou-Abdou, Kyle Sanchez, Kevin Billings, Will Tran and Brendin Bish

that supports esports for community colleges.

And the program is expanding as fast as its ranks. It’s in the early stages of forming a partnership with Anaheim-based audio/visual company Extron, which has a specific esports division catering to and designing equipment for esports teams around the world.

Yes, “world.”

Before we return to Uma and the Hawks, a quick lesson to disabuse you of the notion that esports are a tiny dot on the sports landscape, played in obscurity by pimply-faced 14-year-olds in their parents’ basement.

If that were the case, moguls like the Kraft Family, who own the New England Patriots, Los Angeles Rams/Denver Nuggets/Colorado Avalanche/Arsenal owner Stan Kroenke, and Steve Cohen, who owns the New York Mets, wouldn’t have invested. Neither would several venture capital firms.

Despite a recession in the sport due to overspending and overexpansion that erased an estimated 10,500 jobs in 2023 and 7,100 in early 2024, according to

Sportico, esports is projected to grow from a \$2.06 billion business to \$9.29 billion by 2032, according to Fortune Business Insights.

That’s the world Uma and his program inhabit, albeit on a three- to four-tournament-a-semester schedule right now. It’s a world featuring more and more universities creating teams — with the subsequent scholarship offers — every year.

So what makes a good esports player? Uma equates his search to a decade playing soccer in his younger days. He was a right fullback, meaning he had a skill set that fit that position better than any of the other 10 positions on a soccer team.

And so it goes for esports athletes. Again, make no mistake. You’re not likely to find a 6-foot-5, 290-pound behemoth or a lithe, 6-7 human pogo stick with a 42-inch vertical leap sitting in front of a computer, calling out commands like a quarterback or point guard.

But the skills required to play esports at this level and beyond would cause even the most traditional sports fan to nod their head in appreciation: micro-

second decision-making, teamwork, communication, adaptability, highly developed technical skills and — last, but not certainly least — strategy.

Just like his soccer analogy, Uma looks for players who can fit a certain role in one of the three games SCC competes in. Regardless of the game, each role requires a deep understanding of strategy, mastery of the game’s nuances and technical development and the ability to process information at warp speed, the better to take advantage of whatever scenario plays out.

“There are general players who play the game casually. We seek out players who can play the game at a highly competitive level,” Uma said. “They have a deeper understanding of the game’s mechanics and understand all that comes into playing the game and working within a team environment. All of the players have to work in a team environment and have to understand that competitive play is significantly different from casual play.”

“Their level of understanding is higher, they understand strategy and sportsmanship, just like any other sport. ... A lot of their skills boil down to two things: pure skill and knowledge of the game. They understand how the core functions of the game work, but they are way more understanding of how much strategy comes into play. These students train for very long hours, implementing strategy and tactics. You’re not playing on your couch. You’re playing with four other students, which means things like cooperation, strategy and other tricks come into play.”

There is more than a certain edge rusher mentality. In all these games, you want to “hit” the opponent as hard as possible in as short a time as possible. Basketball point guards? Someone’s got to set up the team, call the plays and get everyone in the right place to inflict maximum offensive damage. And central defenders in soccer? Sir Isaac Newton was 337 years early on the esports front when he postulated that for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. That defensive reaction plays a critical role in every esports battle.

“People think of this as a game, but we take it more seriously,” Uma said. “This is a passion that’s a basically turned into something allowing them to engage with their education. Almost our entire team are STEM majors or computer science or engineering majors, and all of them perform really well academically.”

“I hold them to the standards of a traditional athlete.”

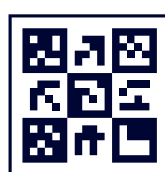


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