

OC “FUTURE BUILT” CTE NEWSCENTER

Feature:

The Language of Support: ASL Career Education Programs in Orange County

When we think of American Sign Language and its many applications, we typically think of a succinct, pragmatic glossary of gestures used to overcome barriers posed by speech-affecting disabilities. But to the individuals and support professionals who work with ASL every day, it's something *bigger*.

Too often, according to Dr. Rita Tamer, ASL instructor and department chair at Saddleback College, the “L” in “ASL” is overlooked.

“What people don’t understand is that the language, itself, is a *true language*, with grammar rules and syntax,” says Tamer. “Some have attempted to take ASL thinking it was going to be easy, then realized that there is a lot more to it than they realized.”

Saddleback’s American Sign Language career education program is one of just three in the region, with Golden West College and Santiago Canyon College also offering coursework in ASL. These programs fulfill a crucial need for professional interpreters, language pathologists, medical professionals and educators in Orange County and beyond.

Graduates of ASL degree and certificate programs go on to a wide variety of careers, related to the business, public services, health and education sectors. Whether in the classroom, the clinic, or even on-stage at Coachella, ASL interpreters are critical to conquering social and professional communications barriers.

“The most common [occupations] are teaching, counseling and the most popular: interpreting,” says Tamer. “People can have interpreters in a variety of settings such as legal, medical, theater/stage, classroom, church... The list can go on and on.”

American Sign Language programs attract a range of students, from “visual learners” looking to fulfill a language requirement, to individuals affected by auditory disabilities, or just seeking specialized communications skills to bolster careers in other sectors. Available awards at Orange County’s community colleges range from an Associate degree program, such as those found at Saddleback and Golden West College, and a door-opening Certificate of Achievement program, as offered at Saddleback and Santiago Canyon College.

With technology improving, and work and school schedules getting tighter and more complex, Orange County’s ASL programs are beginning to take a multiplatform

approach. According to Tamer, it was critical to adapt to the “direction of the times” by evolving beyond the classroom, and into hybrid and fully-online opportunities.

“This has been appealing to most students because it works with and around their other life schedules,” she says.

“We are very committed to making sure the student walks away with a positive experience and education in ASL and deaf culture that will last them a lifetime.”