

# Putting California's Working Learners at the Center

Design principles for  
the online community college



## INSTITUTE FOR THE FUTURE

Institute for the Future (IFFF) is celebrating its 50th anniversary as the world's leading non-profit strategic futures organization. The core of our work is identifying emerging discontinuities that will transform global society and the global marketplace. We provide organizations with insights into business strategy, design process, innovation, and social dilemmas. Our research spans a broad territory of deeply transformative trends, from health and health care to technology, the workplace, and human identity. IFFF is based in Palo Alto, California. For more, visit [www.ifff.org](http://www.ifff.org).



## California's Community Colleges Chancellor's Office

Among the activities of the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, the programs of the Division of Workforce and Economic Development bridge the skills and jobs mismatch and prepare California's workforce for 21st century careers. The Division serves as administrator for several streams of state and federal funds, including Governor's Career Technical Education Pathways Initiative (SB70), Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006, and Proposition 98 dollars for Apprenticeship, Economic & Workforce Development (EWD), and Career Technical Education (CTE).

The Division collaborates with employers, organized labor, local communities, and their community colleges through programming supported by these funds to close the skills gap and to foster successful student completion



## INSTITUTE FOR THE FUTURE

201 Hamilton Avenue, Palo Alto, CA 94301

[www.ifff.org](http://www.ifff.org)

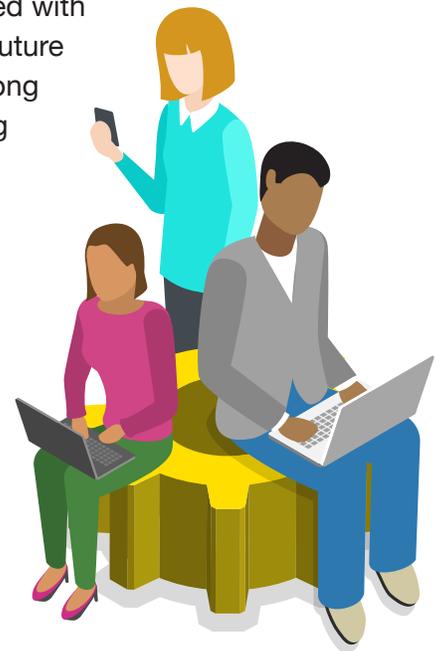


## OVERVIEW

Community college has always been open and accessible, intended as a place where anyone can go to learn new skills for getting ahead in the workforce or for getting the education needed to transfer to a four-year college. Today, online learning creates an unprecedented opportunity for community colleges to fulfill this purpose on a scale never before possible.

Consider that millions of people in California’s workforce today need new skills and credentials to get ahead, but simply can’t fit traditional college courses into their lives. To serve these students, Governor Jerry Brown proposed the creation of a new kind of community college—an online-only community college—to supplement California’s 114 existing community college campuses. The new Online Community College is being developed specifically for “stranded workers,” people in the workforce who lack the skills and credentials to advance. But what does this new Online Community College actually look like? How do we ensure that it genuinely serves the needs of working learners?

Creating an online college that meets the needs of these workers involves far more than just getting the technology right. The entire system has to be designed from the ground up to put the learner front and center. To ensure this, the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office collaborated with Institute for the Future on a six-month-long project identifying key principles to optimize design of the online college for stranded workers.





## METHODOLOGY

This report synthesizes and builds on the results of a workshop designed to answer those questions. On April 4 and 5, 2018, Institute for the Future, along with the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, hosted a two-day workshop to kick-start thinking and inspire imagination about what the 115th community college in California could be—and how we can start to make that a reality. We convened more than fifty experts from domains likely to impact the future of online learning in low-income markets—from faculty, students, and administrators to employers, union organizers, disability advocates, and tech innovators. We led them through a series of collaborative exercises designed to help them think creatively, critically, and strategically about the future, and the design process to come.

To help frame the conversation, participants each took part in a series of preparatory activities: a one-hour interview on their thoughts and perspectives on online learning, working learners, and how they define success; a ninety-minute future forces and signal spotting webinar; and at least nine hours of hands-on exploration of cutting-edge digital

learning platforms and applications. At the workshop itself, participants were exposed to further Institute for the Future research around the changing nature of work and organizations. And they heard from and engaged with current working learners with deep experience using online platforms, as well as representatives from some of the most innovative digital learning platforms.

A key part of the workshop was exploring the foundational principles on which the 115th community college would be built, starting from the principles laid out by Governor Brown, who has stated that the college must be accessible, affordable, competency based, and not linked to the academic calendar.

The design principles laid out in this report were generated through the group's efforts over two days. But this represents only the very beginning of the work that must be done to design an online community college that truly supports the complex needs of working learners now and into the future. The hope is that these principles will provide a strong foundation and guide the work as it unfolds.



# DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR THE ONLINE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

In 2018, California committed to creating its first fully online community college, with plans to launch in fall 2019. In support of this effort, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office and Institute for the Future identified key design principles for this new online-only college to ensure its optimization for stranded workers.



## USER-CENTRIC

Rethink the learning experience from scratch to truly put the student at the center.



## ACCESSIBLE

Make it easy for workers to fit learning into their lives, regardless of life circumstances, physical abilities, and access to technology.



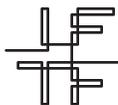
## AFFORDABLE

Explore alternative financing models to ensure working learners can afford to fit learning into their lives.



## EASY ON & OFF RAMPS

Make it easy to sign up and get started, and capture the process in a meaningful way.



INSTITUTE FOR THE FUTURE



### ADAPTIVE & FLEXIBLE

Take full advantage of digital technology to provide modular coursework that can be optimized for different contexts.



### COMPETENCY- BASED

Meet working learners where they are by recognizing informal experience, skills, and goals.



### PERSONALIZED

Tailor coursework to the circumstances, abilities, and interests of working learners and offer coaching and cohort support.



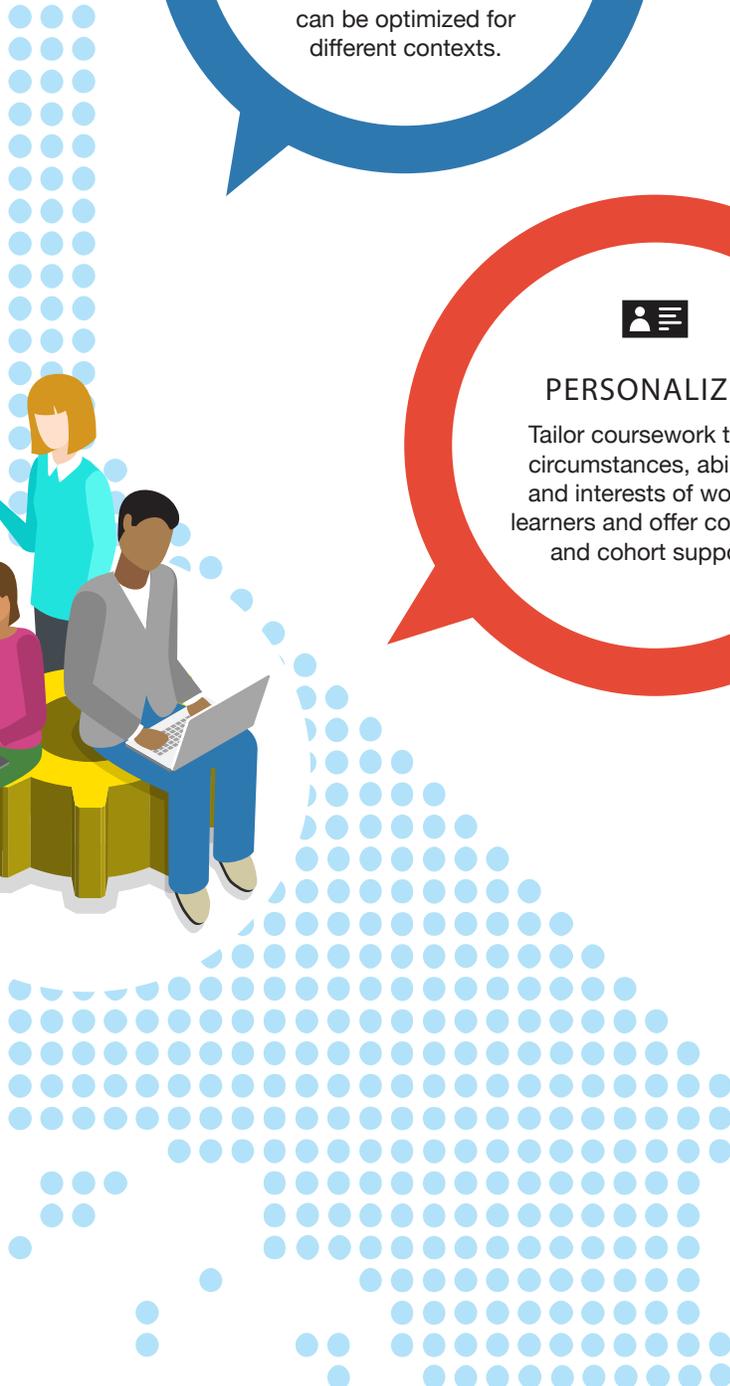
### CONNECTED

Link directly to employers, four-year colleges, and physical California Community College campuses.



### SUSTAINABLE

Ensure technology, interfaces, and coursework keep evolving and funding streams are resilient.





## USER-CENTRIC

**Rethink the learning experience from scratch  
to truly put the student at the center.**

The Online Community College provides an opportunity to design a system centered on working learners from the ground up. Without the constraints of a legacy infrastructure, designers can question existing assumptions about how learning works, the structures and constructs that support learning experiences, and even the roles that exist in a contemporary community college. But the design can't be developed just by thinking about the theoretical needs of theoretical students. Working learners need to play a central role in the design process from the very start. In practical terms, this means deeply involving a small set of learners in the college's development at the outset and then gathering feedback from the much larger set of learners who come to use the system as it rolls out.

- **Who is the working learner we aim to serve**, and how can this population be given a voice in the design process so that we do not make assumptions about their needs?
- **How would we design a learning system** if we didn't have any of the constraints of legacy systems and didn't need to recreate the roles present in a contemporary community college?
- **How can we incorporate user feedback** as a key element of the design process from the very start?



## ACCESSIBLE

**Make it easy for workers to fit learning into their lives, regardless of life circumstances, physical abilities, and access to technology.**

When designing for California’s working learners, we must consider their diverse circumstances, abilities, and access to technology resources to ensure the college is within reach for all. Work and family obligations make people’s schedules hectic and unpredictable. Learners with limited English language ability face difficulties in signing up for classes, understanding course content, and navigating the system. Lack of tech savvy, access to devices, and access to consistent Internet connectivity makes it hard to take classes online. And disabilities create unique access issues for online learning that are distinct from those in a location-specific learning setting. In order to meet working learners where they are, we have to understand the barriers to access they face and design with those in mind.

- **How can we create a system that is inviting to people who may not have had positive experiences with formal education in the past?**
- **How can we identify and lower the barriers that have historically kept some populations from pursuing higher education?**
- **How can we promote the Online Community College to ensure that working learners who would most benefit from it are aware of it and know how to get started?**

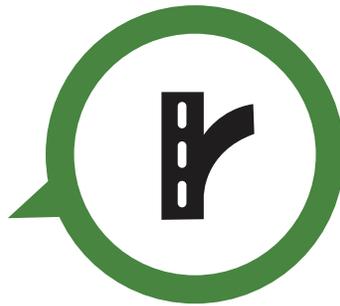


## AFFORDABLE

**Explore alternative financing models to ensure working learners can afford to fit learning into their lives.**

Making the Online Community College affordable for working learners means more than just addressing the price of tuition and materials, including devices for accessing content. It also means providing robust financial aid and ensuring that the timing and process for tuition payments or financial assistance distribution don't inadvertently prevent people from signing up. It means providing learning opportunities that complement, and don't interfere with, people's existing livelihoods and income streams from work. This could include partnering with employers as investors in the overall system or as sponsors for their individual employees. Working learners must also be reassured that their time investment will result in meaningful gains in the workforce.

- **What types of new financing models and partnerships can we develop** to ensure no Californian is left behind for lack of funds?
- **Can the devices needed to access the Online Community College be made available** to students in a way that is within their financial reach?
- **How can we identify and eliminate** points of financial friction within the new Online Community College model?



## EASY ON & OFF RAMPS

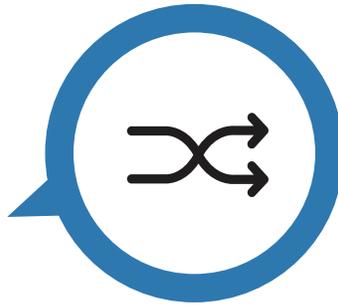
**Make it easy to sign up and get started, and capture progress in meaningful way.**

The Online Community College needs to be able to compete in a world of one-click sign-ups and proliferating for-profit educational alternatives. Designing the interface to make it easy for working learners to come onboard or to pick up where they left off will be critical. This means not overloading learners with too much paperwork or advance information at the beginning, but instead progressively collecting and revealing information as it is most relevant. Just as important will be helping working learners move smoothly from coursework to paid work or further education. All too often students leave college not knowing how to put their new skills to work. Working learners need the Online Community College to connect them with employers, four-year colleges and other opportunities. That could mean partnering with other campuses and employers to create complementary systems, helping match learners with job opportunities, and making sure credentials are recognized and records are easily accessible.

- **Taking cues from app and game design**, how can we make it engaging to get learners signed up and fully using the platform?

- **What systems and processes can we put in place** to help students understand their learning progress and communicate that to prospective employers or degree programs?

- **How can we develop defined pathways** for learners to move smoothly from coursework to paid work or to further coursework at four-year colleges?



## ADAPTIVE & FLEXIBLE

**Take full advantage of digital technology to provide modular coursework that can be optimized for different contexts.**

Working learners have busy lives, often juggling multiple jobs and caretaking tasks. Many have schedules that require coursework to fit into small breaks between other activities, while others might have a block of a few hours to spend just one day a week. Similarly, some might need audio-only instruction that they can listen to in the car or on the train, while others may prefer viewing a video or webcast from a mobile device or desktop computer. Digital platforms have an unprecedented ability to deliver information and services to people in a variety of different formats at a relatively low transaction cost, but all too often online courses just replicate the in-class experience, and fail to take advantage of the unique capacities and advantages of the digital realm. The Online Community College must take full advantage of this technological versatility to fit students' unique circumstances. Courses can be modular, branching off in different directions depending on student need. The modules can be of varying sizes, and the experience of learning can be flexible. Seamless handoff between platforms and devices will be critical.

- **How would we approach the idea of a class differently** if we knew everything had to be cut into 10-minute chunks?
- **How can we create an experience** that is equally enriching when consumed in small bites and when consumed over the course of many consecutive hours?
- **How can you use new tech like virtual reality and chatbots** to create learning experiences that take full advantage of their affordances, not simply replicate the classroom experience?



## COMPETENCY-BASED

**Meet working learners where they are by recognizing informal experience, skills, and goals.**

Working learners will be coming to the Online Community College with a wealth of previous knowledge and experience from the workplace and beyond. Many will already possess substantial skills and savvy that have not been recognized by education systems of the past. The Online Community College must meet working learners where they are by valuing and giving credit for non-school-based learning they have done previously and not requiring them to log hours just for the sake of logging hours. It must help them to plan their learning paths to build on the strengths they already have—and give them the flexibility by crediting learning they do outside the online college. This can be done by carefully assessing knowledge and abilities upon entry and helping learners easily gauge the options available to them, and the various ways and learning paths where their skills could be applied and built upon.

- **How can we develop a way to assign credit** for skills and knowledge working learners have already acquired?
- **How can we assess competency** along the way to make sure learners are on track to reach their goals?
- **What other tools and processes could we employ** to help working learners to value and articulate understand their learnings outside of school in academic terms and beyond?

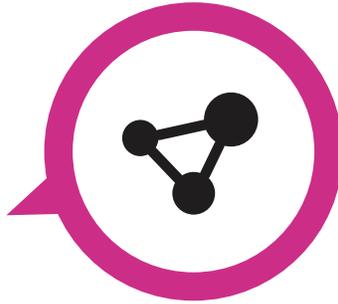


## PERSONALIZED

**Tailor coursework to the circumstances, abilities, and interests of working learners and offer coaching and cohort support.**

Online learning can feel impersonal unless special care is taken to personalize the experience for learners. One aspect of this is tailoring what is offered and how it is delivered to the individual learner so that they feel recognized and respected. Another aspect is acknowledging that without the personal interaction that a physical classroom setting provides, online learners need help developing a sense of community and accountability. They need to be able to connect with peers, instructors, and advisors who know who they are and can put a face with a name. The Online Community College must provide working learners with the ability to convene with others in their cohort and to receive personalized one-on-one support and coaching, both digitally and beyond.

- **How can we create an online system that's fundamentally supportive**, where people can get their questions answered no matter what the time, and each learner feels they have someone championing them individually?
- **What programs, structures, or options might the Online Community College provide** for peer learning?
- **What types of tools and resources can we provide** to help working learners articulate their desired outcome, set personal goals and timelines, and pace themselves accordingly?

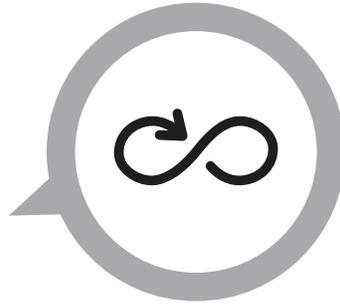


## CONNECTED

**Link directly to employers, four-year colleges,  
and physical California Community College campuses.**

With industries changing at a dizzying pace, the college must stay in constant dialogue with employers and workforce development agencies, both locally and beyond to ensure its curriculum gives working learners the skills that will provide them with new or expanded job opportunities—and to create a smooth transition from coursework to paid work. The college must also be deeply connected and complementary to physical community colleges, sharing revenue, ensuring credits are transferable, and supporting students who are enrolled in both online and in-person classes.

- **What types of on-the-ground networks** or in-person relationships can we cultivate in order to create a more connected experience for working learners and other stakeholders?
- **What types of local experiences** might the Online Community College facilitate to help learners discover new opportunities and resources in their area?
- **How can the Online Community College create and maintain relationships** with physical community colleges that offer real benefits to their working learners?



## SUSTAINABLE

Ensure technology, interfaces, and coursework keep evolving and funding streams are resilient.

While the Online Community College must be cutting-edge and contemporary, it must also be built to last, with the capacity for growth and adaptation. Plans must be made to accommodate technological advances so that the college functions with the evolving suite of devices that learners have access to—and takes advantage of new technologies that cost less or enhance learning. Funding for the college must also be sustainable and come from a robust set of sources, from state funds to partnerships with the other community colleges, employers and their corporate social responsibility arms, and student fees.

- **How might the Online Community College partner with industry** to provide the most up-to-date and relevant content and resources to its learners?
- **How can we ensure instructors and staff are constantly learning** and keeping up to date without overburdening and burning them out?
- **How might the Online Community College expand its funding** sources to ensure longevity?

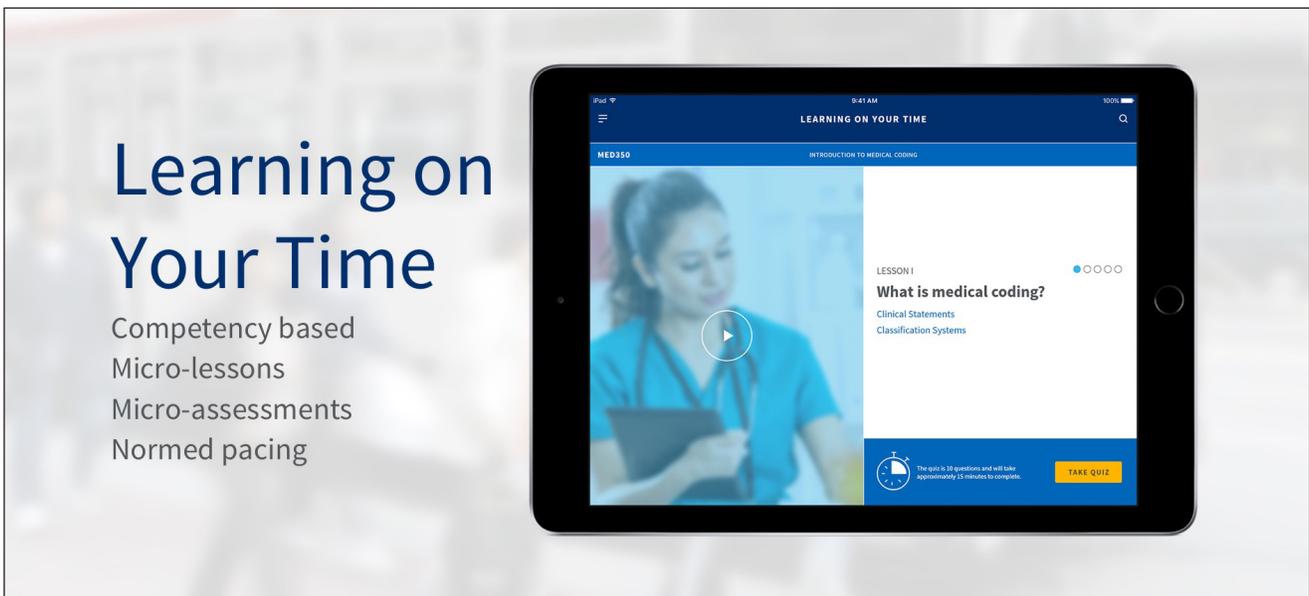


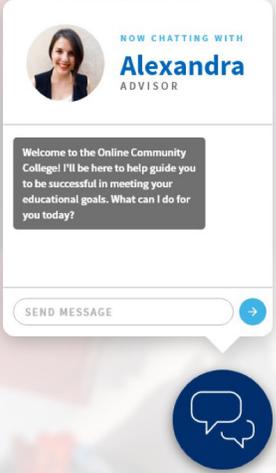
# IMAGINE THE FUTURE TODAY

What might these design principles look like in action?

Check out the ideas below and explore even more at

[doingwhatmatters.cccco.edu/FullyOnlineCommunityCollege/Events.aspx#lab](http://doingwhatmatters.cccco.edu/FullyOnlineCommunityCollege/Events.aspx#lab)





## Student Support

- Success Coach
- From onboarding to completion
- Personalized study plan
- Weekly check-in
- Answer questions

## Bundled Equipment





## WORKSHOP ATTENDEES



**Tom Abell**

Stanford Transformative Learning Technologies Laboratory

**David Allee**

Glenn County Health and Human Services Agency

**Sylvia Amito'elau**

Coastline Community College, Classified Staff

**Maria Anguiano**

Minerva Schools at KGI

**Madelyn Arballo**

Mt. San Antonio Regional Consortium, AEBG Community College

**Deb Barker-Garcia**

California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office

**Priscilla Butler**

Academic Senate

**Bo Cheli**

Study.com

**Valerie Cuevas**

Silicon Valley Community Foundation

**Stephen DiFilippo**

Just Right Strategies, LLC

**Zachary Dowell**

Los Rios CCD, California Federation of Teachers

**Antoinette Dozier**

Western Center on Law and Poverty

**Autumn Elliott**

Disability Rights California

**Tessa Finlev**

Institute for the Future

**John Freitas**

Academic Senate

**Diana Garcia**

Stanford Transformative Learning Technologies Laboratory

**Marina Gorbis**

Institute for the Future



**Thomas Green**

American River College,  
CEO Representative

**Paula Hansen**

Independent Graphic Recorder

**Rebecca Hanson**

SEIU-UHW and Joint Employer  
Education Fund

**Jennifer Hernandez**

State of California Labor  
and Workforce Development  
Agency

**Vanessa Hernandez**

California Youth Connection

**Tammy Johns**

Strategy and Talent  
Corporation

**Ray Kaupp**

California Community Colleges  
Chancellor's Office

**Martha Laboissiere**

McKinsey and Company

**Bob Lanter**

California Workforce  
Association

**Alejandro Lomeli**

Student Senate for  
California Community Colleges

**Mary Mancuso**

Napa Valley Hire Resources

**Sarah McGinn**

SEIU Local 1000

**Bryan Miller**

Foundation for California  
Community Colleges

**Rebecca Miller**

SEIU-UHW

**Rhonda Mohr**

California Community Colleges  
Chancellor's Office

**Joe Moreau**

Foothill DeAnza CCD,  
CTO Representative

**Christian Osmena**

California Community Colleges  
Chancellor's Office

**Lark Park**

Office of Governor  
Edmund G. Brown Jr.

**Omid Pourzanjani**

California Community Colleges  
Chancellor's Office

**Charna Pratt**

Mercury Systems

**Tabitha Romero**

Student Senate for California  
Community Colleges

**Bill Ryan**

Institute for the Future

**Sara Skvirsky**

Institute for the Future

**Lorraine Slattery-Farrell**

Academic Senate

**Jeremy Smith**

State Building and  
Construction Trades Council  
of California

**Joshua Sparks**

Walmart Foundation

**Spencer Stewart**

Western Governors University

**Tracy Thomas**

California Community Colleges  
Chancellor's Office

**James Todd**

Modesto Junior College,  
CSSO Representative

**Van Ton-Quinlivan**

California Community Colleges  
Chancellor's Office

**Francine Van Meter**

Academic Senate

**Katrina VanderWoude**

Grossmont-Cuyamaca  
Community College District,  
CIO Representative

**Ann Volk**

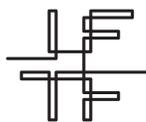
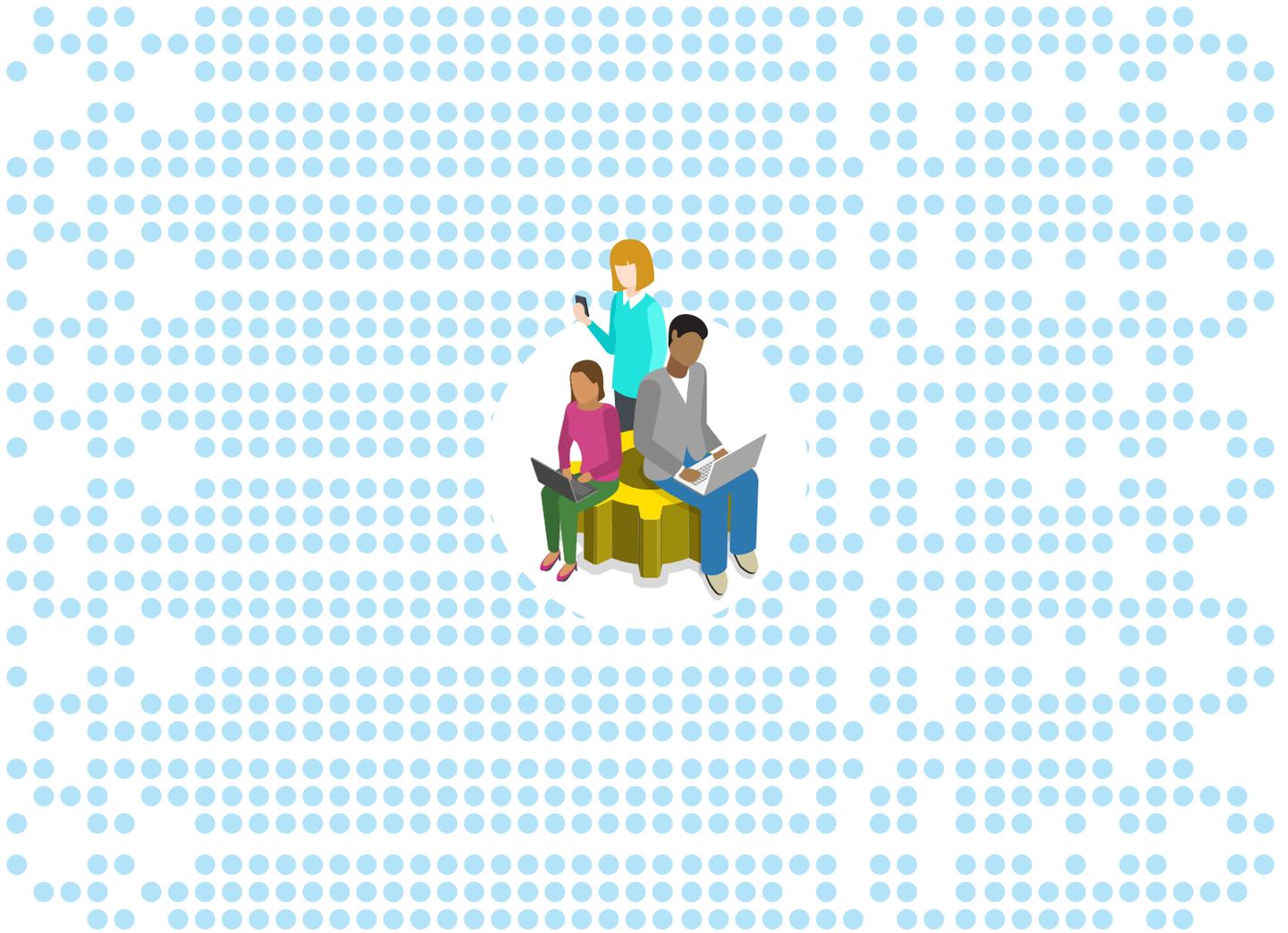
California Community Colleges  
Chancellor's Office

**John Werner**

Sequoias Adult Education  
Consortium, AEBG K12  
Representative

**Sangil Yoon**

UC Berkeley,  
Haas School of Business



50  
YEARS



California  
Community  
Colleges



Doing What MATTERS  
FOR JOBS AND THE ECONOMY