

TASK FORCE AIM: JOB-READY STUDENTS

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OCEANSIDE

The new president of MiraCosta College is leading a state task force of educators and employers working to make future community college students better-prepared for the emerging job market.

Sunita Cooke began her new job on the Oceanside campus of the community college Friday after serving seven years as president of Grossmont College in El

Cajon.

About two weeks ago, she got another new job when California Community Colleges Chancellor Brice Harris announced she would head the 24-member Task Force on Workforce, Job Creation and a Strong Economy.

The time is right for the task force, she said, because many community colleges are rebuilding workforce programs that were cut during the recession. As the colleges are rebuilding those programs,

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new jobs throughout the state are emerging.

The chancellor created the task force to help the new college programs align with the needs of the business world.

"There are a number of jobs available now, and the projections through 2020 are for a preponderance of jobs that require middle skills and jobs that require postsecondary training," Cooke said. "That's where community colleges really come in."

A USA Today analysis of data from Economic Modeling Specialists International and CareerBuilder found that about 2.5 million new, well-paying middle-skill jobs will be created by 2017, accounting for about 40 percent of all job growth.

A recent study by Deloitte, however, found 55 percent of manufacturers said there was a moderate shortage of qualified workers in their companies and 12 percent said there was a serious shortage.

Another study by Chegg found that only 39 percent of hiring managers say recent college graduates they have interviewed in the past two years are prepared for a job in their field of study.

Cooke said the task force's mission will be to find where

jobs are and how students can be better-prepared for them.

This is the third task force created by the chancellor's office. Another task force that looked at the feasibility of offering four-year degrees at community colleges resulted in legislation allowing some of the schools to do that. The other task force was on student success and resulted in 2012 legislation that made some important services more accessible to students.

Cooke said the new task force also could result in similar changes, such as lifting certain regulations to allow new certifications in certain fields and streamlining the process to earn credentials.

Members of the task force include the president and CEO of the California Chamber of Commerce, a counselor at Pasadena City College, an executive director at JPMorgan Chase and a representative of the California Labor Federation.

Tim Rainey, executive director of the California Workforce Investment Board, and Lynn Shaw, president of the Community College Association of Long Beach City College, are co-chairs on the task force.

Cooke's background includes serving on the board

of the San Diego East County Chamber of Commerce and the San Diego County Workforce Partnership. She also has served as regional leader for workforce development and on the state chancellor's Workforce and Economic Development Advisory Council. Nationally, she's served on the American Association of Community College's Emerging Trends Council.

The task force's work began in December with meetings at community colleges, where staff members were asked what they thought needed to be changed so schools could be more responsive to employer needs.

The second phase begins next month with town hall meetings across the state to hear from elected officials, business leaders, economic development agencies, schools, labor and the public.

A list of town hall meeting locations will be posted at <http://doingwhatmatters.cccco.edu/StrongWorkforce/Events.aspx>.

The task force's final phase will involve meetings with all its members to deliberate and make recommendations by the end of this summer.

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