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Mobile App to Help Latino Families

Make College and Career Decisions

By Sylvia Mendoza

An innovative bilingual mobile application might be the first to provide Latino students from underserved communities in California with opportunities not only for more targeted higher education goals, but to land higher paying jobs.

The app, tentatively scheduled for a 2016 prototype unveiling in California's economically distressed Inland Empire, will make available right from iOS or Android devices, comparisons of community colleges, degrees and certification programs, careers and salaries. A variety of linked resources on the app will also help students analyze their skills gap in order to make the best possible short-term educational choices for long-term financially sound career decisions.

"Videos and apps are the language of the young," explains **Van Ton-Quinlivan**, vice chancellor of workforce and economic development of California's Community Colleges (CCC). "In the past, resource content has been rich, but the carry through with technology or electronic devices has been wonky. We want to take the content and present it in an intuitive way that speaks the language that young Latinos use. The app can whet their appetite. It can be a usable tool to help them make effective higher ed choices, offer early career exploration, and link them to better paying jobs."

The idea of the app is a result of a partnership among the California Community Colleges Chancellor's office, the nonprofit Foundation for California Community Colleges, sister state agencies and the activist nonprofit, Young Invincibles. Armed with a \$375,000 grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, a nonprofit guided by the belief that "all children should



Van Ton-Quinlivan

have an equal opportunity to thrive," the joint project shows the importance of increasing a variety of platforms, devices and formats for educational outreach, retention and future economic growth.

The partners identified regions in California with the highest need of such intervention. The communities in the Inland Empire, which include Riverside

and San Bernardino, were selected for the app pilot program because they are set to experience economic growth across emerging industry sectors, but there are not enough trained people in these fields to fill the job openings, explains **Nancy Pryor**, external affairs manager for the Foundation for California Community Colleges. They want students to be aware of the areas where economic growth is most likely so they can choose their studies more wisely. These growing career paths include advanced manufacturing, global trade and logistics, and health. In addition, there is advanced transportation and renewables and information, communication, technology (ICT) /digital media.

“The California Community Colleges are poised to provide these educational and training opportunities,” explains **Emily Robinson**, technology and special projects director at the Foundation for California Community Colleges. The Chancellor’s Office already works on developing a framework that will better match education with skills, she says.

“We take incentive funds and work to close the skills gap,” says **Ton-Quinlivan**, who was named a “White House Champion of Change” for her work



Nancy Pryor

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Van Ton-Quinlivan, vice chancellor of workforce and economic development of California’s Community Colleges.

as vice chancellor. Nearly \$6 million in resource funds goes straight to the colleges, she explains, but approximately \$200 million are discretionary funds available for the 112 colleges in California to use for innovative resources.

The app will start as a multigenerational pilot program in the Inland Empire and its success will determine how and when to roll it out to the whole state, says Robinson.

“The app can engage the whole family unit,” says Robinson. “Parents might not be aware of what’s out there beyond postsecondary education, but they can benefit when they learn about job information and salaries.

“They might think this is in reach for my child but maybe it’s in reach for me, too. They can be the secondary beneficiary.”

Latino Millennials To Benefit

Reaching young Latinos is still a primary focus. That's where the partnership with the Young Invincibles is instrumental. The Young Invincibles (YI) is a think tank and advocacy group addressing the needs of millennials, which is the 18-34 age group, explains **Gustavo Herrera**, YI western regional director.

"Our YI advisors are the consulting arm of strategizing new ways to reach this generation, give them a voice, set them up for a better financial future and advance economic opportunities in the core issues of health care, higher education and workforce development," says Herrera.

There is much work to be done. The Young Invincibles website (<http://younginvincibles.org/>) provides reports such as *Closing the Race Gap in California*, which breaks down how different millennial age and racial groups are affected and affect local economies. They state how there are "nearly 700,000 more Hispanic millennials in the state labor force than white millennials" and when compared to other ethnic groups in California, despite higher education and degrees, there is still a significant wage gap.

That is why, with resources like the bilingual mobile app, the gap can start to shrink. The YI mission is well aligned with the CCC.

"We try to integrate technology for everything we're doing. Google can get confusing," said Herrera. "For this exploratory process, in just a few swoops on their phones, we can point folks in the right direction appropriate to the times, and offer what is relevant for today and to them in particular. They can have access to lots of information."

So much is already in place with California Community Colleges, there is no need to reinvent the wheel, he says. Initial effort is to determine the validity of the content with focus groups can provide a bigger picture landscape analysis. The developmental phase of the app began in October. The Young Invincibles will be working with guidance counselors, students and parents as focus groups to tell them what they like, need, want and what doesn't work or interest them in relation to what they think about college and exploring career options. Taking all the feedback into consideration, they can tweak it to make the app most effective.

Other resources already available through CCC, such as "Salary Surfer" (<http://salarysurfer.cccco.edu/Salary-Surfer.aspx>) and "Doing What Matters for Jobs and the Economy" (<http://doingwhatmatters.cccco.edu/>), will be linked to the app, as well. These can have great data that help guide their career decisions. Under the health field tab on the Salary Surfer home page, for example,



Emily Robinson

it shows what type of degree is needed to be a paramedic versus a dental hygienist – and what they can each earn out over a five year period. Students might never be aware of the potential income for their education and training without this type of information.

"Some don't realize that a health technician can make \$40,000 a year and \$19,000 to \$20,000 on a similar job without certification," says Ton-Quinlivan.

The app will also include links to video vignettes that feature people in different fields, talking about their jobs and salaries, as well as their educational training.

"We'll take this research and turn it into an application that they'll not only have, but use," says Herrera. "Why we're particularly excited about this project is because we are all hungry for tools that work. This will have everything in one place. Having more at their fingertips means they can navigate more resources. They can take control of their own education and career path, and make better choices that benefit them. It's empowering."

Ton-Quinlivan agrees. The digital divide is not really there, she says, especially with the potential of an app like this. "Students will see a better return on investment for their education." ☺