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offerings

Newest player in career upskilling world will curate community colleges' online offerings

Submitted by Doug Lederman on October 16, 2019 - 3:00am

SANTA FE, N.M. -- After many years as a backwater, the landscape of entities seeking to improve the education and training of adults is getting crowded.

Companies like [Google](#) [1] and Amazon Web Services have fast-growing offerings of their own for would-be workers. Numerous public college and university systems, including the California Community Colleges and the University of Massachusetts system, are creating online institutions aimed to serve working learners and the millions of adults with some college and no degree.

And a growing group of intermediaries, such as Guild Education and InStride, from Arizona State University, are stepping in to try to connect employers with the offerings of educational providers.

A new player hopes to step into that fray next year, differentiating itself from those already in the space with the goal of collecting and distributing the best noncredit offerings from a cohort of leading community colleges to those institutions and their local employers.

The organization, calling itself Unmudl (think about bringing clarity to the murky and confusing space of adult learning), was [unveiled Monday](#) [2] at the annual Close It conference here. Close It brings together educators, foundation officials, human resources administrators and researchers each fall to talk about how to educate more adults, and the organization behind the conference, the nonprofit [Innovate+Educate](#) [3], is also a driver of Unmudl.

The platform is the brainchild of a public benefit corporation, Socialtech.ai, but it involves a collaboration between numerous organizations (like the National Institute for Staff and Organization Development) and five initial community college partners: Bellevue Community College, in Washington; Central New Mexico Community College; GateWay Community College, part of Phoenix's Maricopa Community College District; Pima Community College, in Tucson, Ariz.; and San Juan Community College, in New Mexico.

Much is still unclear about the platform its creators call a "one-stop work+learn marketplace" -- it's new enough that even some of its college partners pronounced it as "un-Moodle" (as in the open source learning management system) instead of "unmuddle."

Among the unanswered questions is whether the platform would ultimately offer courses directly to students, rather than through institutions, and how the organizers would decide which programs to include and which to exclude -- decisions that can be dicey in any partnership involving multiple colleges.

But the gist is that the college partners will contribute their own courses and programs to the platform for their peers to package with their own as they build custom programs to help their local employers train workers and would-be workers.

Where universities like Arizona State University form partnerships with national and global employers like Starbucks, and Guild Education brokers training for the Walmarts of the world, Unmudl's college partners are likely to aim at the many more small employers who have no HR departments, let alone chief learning officers.

Unmudl's early partners saw promise both as providers and consumers. "It's a way to scale affordability and flexibility that we can't offer on our own," said Kristin Gubser, director of external affairs at GateWay Community College.

"I'm not going to lie," said Jennifer Sohonie, director of community solutions at Bellevue College. "I'm most excited about the distribution of our education, because distribution means more equity -- distribution means more opportunity for students."

Celina Bussey, chief workforce development officer at Central New Mexico Community College, said finding additional ways to share the expertise of the two-year institution's school of energy had been part of its strategic plan.

And David Doré, president of Pima Community College's Northwest and Downtown campuses, was hopeful the institution's new certificate to train autonomous truck drivers would be in demand beyond its south Arizona service area.

Ultimately, if the collaboration works, the most important outcome could be what often emerges when community colleges achieve their goals: access to education for those who have historically been most excluded, said Andrew Jones, interim president of Los Angeles Trade-Technical College, which is helping Unmudl round out the set of 15 institutional partners it hopes to launch with next spring.

"Our interest is almost exclusively social equity," Jones said.

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[2] <https://markets.businessinsider.com/news/stocks/forward-thinking-community-colleges-become-founding-members-of-first-global-work-learn-marketplace-1028597440>

[3] <https://innovate-educate.org/>

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