

APPRENTICESHIP

Foothill College Launches Dental Assistant Apprenticeship

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With a constant shortage of dental assistants, California dentists have found it hard to adequately staff their offices. Dental assistants are an integral part of any dentist's office. They work directly with dentists during certain treatment procedures, and independently—taking X-rays, making impressions of patient's teeth and interacting directly with patients to maintain oral health.

This past September, Bay Area-based Foothill Community College launched a new dental assistant apprenticeship program. Foothill already has a history of producing well-trained dental assistants through its college program. The Program Director, Professor Cara Miyasaki, noticed that a high proportion of her dental assisting students were full-time employees working in unrelated fields while simultaneously enrolled in the dental assistant training program. Miyasaki collaborated with the Dean and the Director of Apprenticeships to develop the first state-approved dental assisting apprenticeship in California.

“This earn-and-learn program is already attracting students who would otherwise not have been able to pursue college,” said Professor Miyasaki. “Students are traveling from cities outside of the Bay Area to become dental assisting apprentices, which shows the strong demand and appeal of apprenticeship.”



After completing training in clinical skills and infection control and hazard waste management, dental assistant apprentices are employed by dentists while they complete their education. Foothill College wanted to ensure that the program was equitable and open to all. There are no tuition fees for apprentices and for the first cohort, all student costs for books and other materials were covered by the California Dental Society.

Apprentices complete the program in 15 months and are eligible to take the registered dental assisting written licensure exam to become a licensed registered dental assistant. With the huge industry support—over 50 dentists signed up to hire apprentices from the first cohort—apprentices are poised for success once they complete the program.