

California Community Colleges implement Kognito's mental health and suicide prevention simulations to reduce stigma and engage faculty, staff, and students in supporting those who exhibit signs of distress.

**Interactive role-play simulations with virtual students create a measurable change in the nation's largest community college system.**

## CHALLENGE

**Recognizing distress and learning how to approach and connect students to the help they need is a challenge for any educational institution.** But for California Community Colleges (CCC)—the largest and most diverse higher education system in the U.S. with 113 campuses in 72 districts ranging from urban to rural to frontier—finding a way to equip staff and students with the confidence and skills to support students in distress was especially challenging.

“We have a large, diverse student population: more foster youth, more veterans, first-generation students, etc. That means more people with more challenges in their lives,” said Betsy Sheldon, Mental Health Services Specialist at the California Community College Chancellor's Office (Chancellor's Office).

“Faculty and staff were very interested in learning how to support their students, but many are part-time educators; they simply don't have time to attend day-long, face-to-face training.”

*“We have a large, diverse student population: more foster youth, more veterans, first-generation students, etc. That means more people with more challenges in their lives.”*

—Betsy Sheldon,  
Mental Health Services  
Specialist at California  
Community Colleges  
Chancellor's Office

Another challenge—the lack of on-campus or even local mental health

resources. “Unlike typical four-year colleges, we're a two-year system without counseling services on every campus,” explained Colleen Ammerman, Program Director for the Foundation for California Community Colleges (Foundation). When the California Mental Health Services Authority (CalMHSA) created funding in 2012 for mental health service prevention and early intervention, Sheldon began searching for a proven, scalable solution that would be accessible to everyone within the CCC system, regardless of geography and time constraints. “We needed a cost-efficient way to reach 113 colleges, 57,700 faculty and staff, and 2.2 million students. It had to be accessible, ‘go-at-your-own-pace’ and it needed to be adaptable to our system, our population, and at the local level.”

**2.2M**  
students

**57,700**  
faculty and staff

**113**  
colleges

**72**  
districts

## CHALLENGE

***An Innovative Rollout of an Innovative Product***  
**In February 2012, the Chancellor’s Office and the Foundation issued a request for proposal from qualified organizations to provide online mental health training to faculty, staff and students within the CCC system.**

After a competitive application process, Kognito, the only company with mental health and suicide prevention digital simulations listed in the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP), was awarded the three-year contract.

“Kognito offered a great combination of interactive and highly engaging simulations tailored to each targeted learner with a detailed plan and track record in being able to roll out and collaborate with large and very diverse campuses.” Sheldon said. Each Kognito simulation was designed as a virtual practice environment where faculty, staff, and students built confidence and skills by engaging in simulated practice conversations with emotionally-responsive virtual students exhibiting signs of distress.

“One of our main goals is to go beyond building mental health awareness and change the culture on campus. We want to empower faculty, staff, and students with the skills and motivation to reach out to students that are showing signs of psychological distress and, if necessary, speak with them about seeking help”, said Ron Goldman, Co-Founder & CEO of Kognito. “Learning these skills and building confidence requires practice and personalized feedback. This is why we centered the learning experience around a series of simulated practice conversations with virtual, fully animated students exhibiting signs of psychological distress.”

In the first year, the California Community Colleges Student Mental Health Program was able to provide licenses of Kognito’s *At-Risk for Faculty & Staff*, *At-Risk for Students*, and *Veterans on Campus for Faculty & Staff*. At the request of the Chancellor’s Office, a tailored strategy was designed for rolling out the simulations effectively to their 113 diverse campuses. As part of this request, Kognito conducted a needs assessment with a sample of CCC campuses and with several cultural competency experts (including the Center for Applied Research Studies). The goal was to devise an effective communication plan to engage all CCC campuses and their faculty, staff, and students in using the simulations and to also examine the need for any content modifications in the existing simulations.

“That’s an important ‘best practice,’ involving the people you’re talking to in the development of the product!” Sheldon said. Kognito implemented the necessary content changes—including campus-specific referral information—then reached out to all 113 CCC campuses to enroll them in the campaign and provide them with a set of tools, tactics, and strategies to help them engage their respective audiences in accessing the simulations.

*“We centered the learning experience around a series of simulated practice conversations with virtual, fully-animated students exhibiting signs of distress as a way to provide learners with hands-on practice.”*

—Ron Goldman, Co-Founder & CEO of Kognito

“We understood that many of these campuses have limited resources—including time, on the part of administrators,” said Goldman. “So it was important for us to provide implementation resources, such as email templates, to help them reach as many faculty, staff, and students as easily as possible, sharing best practices from what has worked well for more than 150 other colleges using the Kognito program at that time (today there are more than 350 colleges using Kognito around the country). The plan worked well. We enrolled 40 campuses in the first six months alone.”



In the second year of the contract, the CCC Student Mental Health Program added three more Kognito programs into the suite offered to CCC campuses. The three additional programs included a peer support version of *Veterans on Campus*, and two simulations to create a more supportive environment for LGBTQ students: *LGBTQ on Campus for Faculty & Staff* and *LGBTQ on Campus for Students*.

Throughout the three year contract, Kognito worked closely with each CCC campus to support their activities in rolling out the simulation, monitoring their success, and enhancing their internal communication and adoption efforts. By the end of the three year contract, Kognito has 100 CCC campuses participating in this project, superseding the initial goal of recruiting 50% of CCC campuses, or 56 campuses. The contract with Kognito has recently been renewed extending the period of access to CCC schools to September 2017.

## RESEARCH

***Shifting the Culture System-wide*** Surveys conducted pre- and post-simulation, as well as in a three-month follow-up, showed that students who completed the Kognito simulation reported a 73% increase in the number of peers whom they referred to mental health services.

Applying this increase to the total number of users who experienced the simulation leads to thousands of more CCC students being referred for services. These results replicate similar findings from national studies in higher education where students, faculty, and staff who completed the Kognito simulations reported significant increases in identifying, talking to, and if necessary,

referring students in psychological distress to support services.

Campus climate measures, which scored well before the rollout, showed improvement during this period as well. “We’re increasing awareness and changing the climate in which distressed students are perceived and treated,” Ammerman said. “We’re shifting the culture across the CCC system. People are realizing, ‘students success is often derailed by stress, anxiety, and depression and with appropriate support, students can learn how to manage their wellness.’”

Feedback from CCC faculty, staff, and students is equally positive. “It’s interesting, compelling, interactive, and never dull.

## KOGNITO HIGHER ED PRODUCT SUITE

Kognito role-play simulations prepare faculty, staff, student leaders, and students to build awareness, knowledge, and skills about mental health and suicide.



AT-RISK FOR FACULTY & STAFF



AT-RISK FOR STUDENTS



VETERANS ON CAMPUS FOR FACULTY & STAFF



VETERANS ON CAMPUS: PEER PROGRAM



LGBTQ ON CAMPUS FOR FACULTY & STAFF



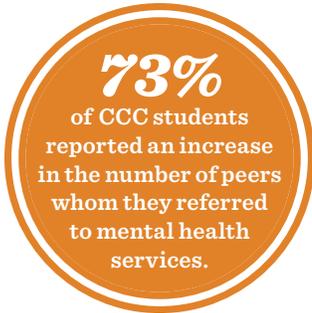
LGBTQ ON CAMPUS FOR STUDENTS

You can do the training in the privacy of your own space, and everyone likes having one CCC-branded portal to access all six simulations.”

Heather McClenahan, Senior Program Specialist at the Foundation, agreed. “The simulation goes down different paths depending on what you say. It’s responsive. And you

get immediate feedback from the characters.”

“It seemed like I was actually talking to real people, not a computer,” said a CCC faculty member. “I really learned a lot. And it was nice being able to get answers to questions I would otherwise have been afraid to ask.”



***We're shifting the culture across the CCC system. People are realizing, 'You don't have to be scared of the topic!' Now, they're feeling that mental health is treatable.***

— Colleen Ammerman,  
Program Director of the  
Foundation for California  
Community Colleges

Sheldon also praised the assessment and tracking tools built into each Kognito program. A variety of data points are recorded, including user demographics, usage, completion rates and changes in perception, motivation, and behavioral intent as recorded in pre-, post- and follow-up surveys. “We appreciate that component,” she said. “It’s easy to extract the number of users and demographics of the users. Being funded by CalMHSA as we are, it’s especially important to show that we are successful and efficient.”

“The simulation helped me realize ways in which I can help people I know who may have trouble tackling obstacles that come up,” a faculty member said. “Also, I can help myself by understanding the different tactics to approach and refer.”

An independent third-party research firm studying the Kognito program, rollout, and impact concluded that CCC should continue using the Kognito simulation for faculty and staff, as well as students “given that both appear to be key sources of referrals and can be trained to improve the rate of such referrals.” They went on to recommend that incentives be considered in order to drive an even greater adoption rate of the simulations by faculty, staff, and students.

The initial three year-contract expired in September 2015 and, seeing such clear impact of the six Kognito simulations, the Chancellor’s Office and Foundation decided to renew for another two years. “We’re committed to creating and sustaining a supportive campus culture among students, faculty, and staff,” Sheldon said. •



California Community Colleges is the largest system of higher education in the nation, providing students with a wide range of educational offerings, including workforce training, basic courses in English and math, certificate and degree programs, and preparation for transfer to four-year institutions.

**Learn more at [cocco.edu](http://cocco.edu)**



Kognito is a health simulation company that believes in the power of conversation to change lives. We are pioneers in developing research-proven, role-play simulations that prepare individuals to lead real-life conversations. Our simulations build and assess confidence and competency by enabling individuals to practice conversations with our growing family of emotionally-responsive virtual people. Our innovative approach uses the science of learning, the art of conversation and the power of game technology to measurably improve social, emotional, and physical health. Kognito is the only company with health simulations listed in the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP).

**Learn more and access demos at [kognito.com](http://kognito.com).**

\* Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS) [Online]. (2013) National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, CDC (producer). Available from URL [www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/index.html).

\*\* Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Results from the 2013 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Mental Health Findings, NSDUH Series H-49, HHS publication No. (SMA) 14-4887. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services.