

Professional Profile: Dr. Amrik Johal (he/him)*Personal and Education*

I immigrated to the United States at eleven years old and attended public school in Oceanside Unified School District in north San Diego County. After graduating, I attended UCLA for my undergraduate studies. For my graduate studies I attended Columbia University Teachers College for my master's degree in Higher and Postsecondary Education Administration. My second master's degree is in Higher Education and Organizational Change from UCLA. And my PhD is in Higher Education and Organizational Change from UCLA. I chose to pursue a PhD rather than an EdD because I'm deeply passionate about systems-level work, research, and theory, particularly the opportunity to bridge theory and practice, which remains a significant gap in the field of higher education. I wanted to immerse myself in rigorous inquiry while building the foundation to teach, write, and publish. Throughout my PhD program, I was working full-time as a California Community College administrator. This required me to petition for permission to work during the PhD program, which was atypical as all of my cohort peers were primarily focused on research assistantships or TA roles. For me, continuing to work was both a financial necessity and an intentional choice to remain grounded in practice and increase my impact in real-time.

Current and Prior Positions

I currently serve as Dean of Student Life and Leadership at Palomar College. In this role, I provide oversight for a wide range of essential departments, including Student Judicial Affairs, Behavioral Health Counseling Services, the Student Health Center, Student Life programs, Student Activities, Behavioral Intervention, Basic Needs, and Nutrition Center at a public, two-year community college with 28,000 FTEs. Provide strategic leadership for student affairs across five sites spanning a 2,500-square-mile district, including the main campus and four education centers (San Marcos, Escondido, Fallbrook, and Rancho Bernardo) at a diverse Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI).

Prior to joining Palomar College, I worked in the South Orange County Community College District at Irvine Valley College as Assistant Dean of Students for six years. I provided comprehensive leadership and oversight for four Student Services departments (Basic Needs, Student Equity, Student Life, and Student Conduct) at a public, two-year community college with 15,000 FTEs. Supervise, manage, and provide direction to two administrators, eight full-time classified professionals, and ten non-bargaining unit employees. Oversee and manage state, federal, and grant funding including the Student Equity and Achievement (SEA) budget (\$4.6 million), Associated Students' budget (\$1 million), and Basic Needs Budget (\$1 million). Oversee enterprise operations including bookstore, food service, and vending; chair collegewide initiatives including Commencement and Teacher of the Year.

Prior to my two most recent roles above, I worked as a classified professional at Mt. San Antonio College, a coordinator at University of Hawai'i College, and as a career counselor at UCLA.

Major Accomplishments

Among my major accomplishments include establishing a long-term partnership between Irvine Valley College and The Allstate Foundation to provide direct funding to students to bolster leadership education and community impact. I not only secured a grant and ongoing funding opportunities, but was selected to 1) join SXSW Edu as a representative of The Allstate Foundation and The Center for Expanding Leadership and Opportunity, 2) serve as a facilitator for The Allstate Foundation's first-ever national youth service summit, and 3) write a book chapter for The Center for Expanding Leadership and Opportunity for their most recent publication. This partnership at the community college district level has supported hundreds of students to date and elevated the district into conversations nationally around youth service and community impact.

In addition to my passion for student leadership and service, am actively engaged in professional organizations to give back through volunteering or conference presentations. For example, I serve on the planning committee for the Asian Pacific Americans in Higher Education (APAHE) conference as I believe in providing a safe space for practitioners to come together in community and collective empowerment. I also present frequently at national conferences, and most recently presented at the NCORE, APAHE, and Chief Student Services Officers (CSSO) conferences over the past year.

Hobbies and Creative Pursuits

My hobbies include working on my car, participating in car shows, and doing car maintenance and minor performance modifications. Since childhood I have loved classic vehicles (globally), and the artistry and engineering that went into designing them (before the more current car market which is more focused on mass production).

My creative pursuits include writing and gardening. I find a lot of fulfillment from the exercise of writing, from brainstorming, to research, to drafting articles. I feel this is an introspective way to move from thoughts to action. I also love gardening, from designing irrigation systems, planting large trees, honing in on the right fertilizer combinations, and giving plants the right environments to thrive. This connection to earth and grow is truly fulfilling for me.

If admitted to the Great Deans program I am looking forward to learning about my cohort members' passions and hobbies, and what fuels them. These types of connections really create a powerful cohesion and a shared sense of "why." They also allow us to support one another at the program's conclusion as we return to our roles, and navigate various issues and challenges. Having that cohesive group can really create a collective sense of support.