

**Finalist:** Sam Agdasi

**Title:** Vice President of Academic Services/Chief Academic Officer at Highland Community College District

A lifelong educator, Sam Agdasi has more than twenty-five years of experience in higher education. His professional experience includes serving at three community college systems in three different states which has immensely enriched his experience. He has served as a faculty member, chair, dean, and vice president of academic services.

In his most recent role, Agdasi served as the Vice President of Academic Services/Chief Academic Officer at Highland Community College in Illinois leading all instructional services of the college including more than seventy academic programs, regional accreditation of the college, strategic enrollment management, budget, production of course catalog and schedule of classes, strategic planning, statewide equity plan, and other academic services endeavors.

Agdasi's leadership at Mt. San Antonio College (Mt. SAC) as the Dean of Technology and Health Division demonstrated his ability to manage a complex division with programs ranging from architecture to nursing in one of California's largest community colleges. His strategic vision and operational acumen led to enrollment growth, enhanced academic program offerings, and design of innovative instructional infrastructures. To ensure student success with equitable outcomes, Agdasi also led and enhanced the operation of three student support centers within the division.

Before joining Mt. SAC, Agdasi Served as the Dean of Advanced Manufacturing, Engineering and Applied Sciences at Ivy Tech Community College of Indiana leading the division on three campuses. Through initiatives that bridged the gap between the college, industry, community, and four-year institutions, Agdasi extended transfer, employment, internship, and research opportunities for students. His work highlighted a forward-thinking approach to educational leadership, deeply informed by his extensive experience and a personal commitment to making a difference in the lives of students.

Prior to serving as an administrator, Agdasi served as a faculty member and chair of nanotechnology program at Ivy Tech community College of Indiana. He developed the entire curriculum including nine nanotechnology courses and deliberately used Open Educational Resources (OER) for those courses. As a result, no student had to forgo course materials due to the prohibitive cost of textbooks. That effort exemplified Agdasi's commitment to providing access to innovative educational opportunities for all students.

Before serving at Ivy Tech, Agdasi was a Research Specialist at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana, and also a Program Chair and Instructor for Purdue Continuing Education Division and developed a non-credit program to prepare students for medical college admission test with a fraction of the cost compared to that of commercial test preparation companies.

On a personal note, Agdasi came to the United States as an immigrant in search of a better life and found opportunities to fulfill that dream. Since then, he feels a deep sense of duty and inner calling to provide the same opportunities for underserved students and help them achieve their dreams, too. He has done that with his deeds not just words: from implementing equity-minded pedagogical strategies when he was a professor, to recruiting diverse faculty and staff since he served as an administrator, from providing state-of-the-art educational infrastructure for community college students, to serving on equity-minded committees; those are all testaments to his commitment to serve the underserved with diversity, equity, and inclusion at the core of his endeavors.