



# MESA MILESTONES

Featuring momentous affairs of the MESA program at Allan Hancock College

Spring 2026

## C6 Goes to CAMP

by Dom Dal Bello, Engineering Professor

Four AHC students – Aliah Andrade, Jesse Cortez, Audel Guizar and Ruby Rocha – and Prof. Dom Dal Bello – attended the annual *California Alliance for Maximizing Potential (CAMP) Conference* at UC Irvine, February 20-21, 2026. CAMP (<https://www.camp.uci.edu>) is a National Science Foundation Louis Stokes

Alliances for Minority Participation (NSF/LSAMP) project that supports undergraduate and early graduate STEM students at the nine undergraduate University of California campuses. This year's conference was held at the Beckman Center of the National Academies of Sciences & Engineering on the UC Irvine Campus.



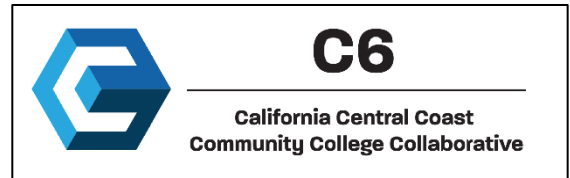
The AHC contingent joined two other 4-student/1-faculty community college teams, one from Cuesta College and one from Monterey Peninsula College. Fifteen total community college participants joined over 100 UC students, faculty and staff in two full days of networking and learning. Activities included two poster sessions full of incredible research done by UC LSAMP undergraduates, four presentations by educational leaders in the UC system and UC Irvine campus, as well as four panel discussions of LSAMP students at various points along their path: (1) alumni who are currently working, (2) graduate students, (2) UC undergraduates, and (4) community college students.



Yes, you read that right. Four community college students served on a *C6 Alliance Student Panel*, including AHC's Audel Guizar and Ruby Rocha.

On Friday night, two AHC alumni engineers dropped by the conference hotel to share their stories and wisdom with the AHC team. Janet Flores works as a biomedical engineer at Stryker in Irvine, and Victor Ramos works as a civil engineer at Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP). A lot of new and exciting experiences were had by the AHC team.

## Wait. What is C6? And what does it have to do with AHC? Why were we even invited to CAMP?



For the past six years, Allan Hancock College has been the lead institution of *C6: California Central Coast Community College Collaborative* (<https://www.hancockcollege.edu/c6/>), a National

Science Foundation Louis Stokes Alliances for Minority Participation Bridge to the Baccalaureate (NSF/LSAMP/B2B) project. Dom Dal Bello was the main writer of the grant and AHC's Co-Principal Investigator, and Christine Reed has been the Project Director. Eight community colleges were in the 3-year \$1.5 million C6 Alliance which includes AHC, Cabrillo, Cuesta, Monterey Peninsula, Moorpark, Oxnard, SBCC, and Ventura. The University of California and the California State Universities both had LSAMP alliances to support undergraduates. C6 was the only community college LSAMP alliance in California, and one of eight community college alliances nationwide.

When CAMP wrote their renewal proposal for their NSF grant, Dom wrote a letter of support for the CAMP project – helping to show that CAMP is interested in working with community college LSAMP partners. Dr. Pheather Harris, at UCI, is the CAMP Director, and invited C6 to send 12 students and 3 faculty to the 2026 CAMP conference. Dom serves on the CAMP Advisory Board.

### How has C6 affected AHC?

C6 was the only community college LSAMP alliance in California, and one of eight LSAMP/B2B alliances nationwide. Two initiatives that were common among all eight C6 colleges were: (1) Embedded Tutors (ETs), and (2) Fall Research Symposium.

The C6 Embedded Tutor program kick-started the current MESA Embedded Tutor program at AHC. C6 initially funded about four ETs at AHC (and roughly the same number at the other 7 community colleges). MESA significantly expanded the ET program; this semester, 37 sections are supported by ETs. So, if you have been in a class with ETs, or are an ET yourself, part of C6's legacy is the Embedded Tutor program.



C6, along with Cal Poly SLO, has hosted the *Fall Research Symposium* at Cal Poly SLO every October for the past 4 years (Fall 2025 was the first year not funded by NSF). If you presented at the Research Symposium, or have attended it with us, that is another outcome of the C6 project. Our partner at Cal Poly has been Dr. Jane Lehr, who not only was the CSU-LSAMP lead at Cal Poly SLO, but leads the Cal Poly SLO Office of Undergraduate Research. Dr. Lehr has also been a partner with Dom and AHC on other NSF grants.

### Some Key Take-Aways

- Take advantage of opportunities to expand your network – both on campus and beyond. You will not only expand who you know, but what you know.
- Apply for internships – either academic research experiences or internships. Even a small activity is a step towards greater endeavors.
- You are not alone. Others are going through similar challenges and rough experiences. Keep moving forward.
- There are a lot of people at AHC and at other institutions working to support you. Programs do not suddenly appear; they often get started by a handful of people trying to make things better.

## Announcing MESA/STEM's Latest Addition!



### ***Please Welcome - Ruby Ramirez, MESA/STEM Academic Success Center Support***

***Specialist.*** Born and raised in Santa Maria, Ruby is proud to return to the same campus that played an important role in her own college journey. Ruby is a first-generation college graduate and an alumna of Allan Hancock College, where she participated in the EOPS program. After graduating from AHC in 2022, she transferred to California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, where she earned her Bachelor of Science in Business Administration with a concentration in Entrepreneurship. Through her own experience as a first-generation student, Ruby understands how powerful mentorship, community, and campus resources can be in helping students reach their goals. She is passionate about creating a welcoming and supportive environment where MESA students feel encouraged, connected, and confident in pursuing their academic and transfer goals in STEM fields. Ruby enjoys working closely with students, faculty, and staff to support student success and help build a strong sense of community in the MESA/STEM Center. Outside of work, Ruby enjoys gardening, creating new projects, cooking, and spending time with her loved ones and pets.

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## Curiosity as Fuel

*by Leticia Mendez Carmona, Computer Engineering, MESA Student*

Hi there! My name is Leticia. I'm a computer engineering major ready to transfer, but my path up to this point hasn't been so linear. I arrived at Hancock as a chemistry major. I chose it based on YouTube videos and its potential application to environmental science, but I quickly realized I didn't connect with the field. Passion and meaning are important to me, and I believe a career should reflect that. This led me to evaluate different paths, ranging from business to nursing. I spent over a year exploring different majors and feeling directionless, but that time invested in personal discovery was well worth it.

I eventually found computer programming. It offered the right sort of challenge, and I felt proud every time I made a program work. However, the hardware inside the computer is what really caught my attention. How does a circuitry of silicon and metals create a device that displays images, performs calculations, and connects to the world? I flooded the internet with questions. What is binary? 1's and 0's? Off and on? Electrons! My curiosity went into overdrive. I realized then why computer engineering is its own branch; the technology is incredibly complex. But as curious as I was, I still needed to understand how this field could add purpose to my life. Through my own research, I found an answer that clicked: space exploration, specifically regarding Mars. Our planet faces real climate risks, and one long-term solution being explored is sustaining human life on another planet. Building the stations and systems to make that possible is a massive engineering challenge. It is going to need dedicated engineers, and that realization turned my curiosity into fuel.

To navigate the difficult coursework, I've learned that my best approach is to ask the simplest question: why? Why do we use this formula? Why do electrons repel each other? Why does pressure drop when volume rises? Asking "why" makes math and science feel intuitive rather than like a wall I'm running into. Understanding the material with depth even allows me to skip the memorization process at times. I don't do this alone, either. I've leaned on resources like tutoring, study groups, and MESA, which has offered the academic and emotional support I need to keep going.

There are moments where life's distractions feel heavy, but I always come back to what this path means to me. I want to be the first in my family to attend a university and earn my bachelor's degree, master's degree, and eventually a doctorate. I want to work for NASA, travel, and live a life I'm proud of. One step at a time; I know I'll get there.



## On the Road to ROAD

by Bryce Miyahara, STEM Learning Laboratory Coordinator

In February, Audel Guizar, President of the Emerging Leaders in Medicine (ELM) Club, approached Christine and I to see if the MESA/STEM program could assist the club in attending the 2026 Reaching Out to Aspiring Doctors (ROAD) Conference. After working out logistics, we were able to reserve a district vehicle and get 9 club members registered for the conference. To transport our group, I drove the district vehicle while Xienna Martinez, the club's



Social Media Manager, drove her personal vehicle. This conference was very accommodating as it did not have a registration or parking fee, and they still provided a full breakfast and lunch. However, this conference took place at UCSF's Fresno campus and started at 9 a.m. on Saturday, March 7<sup>th</sup>. This is over 170 miles from AHC, which meant we had to leave Santa Maria before 5:30 a.m. to arrive on time for check-in.



But we pulled it off! The ELM Club members kept to our schedule, and after a brief pit-stop in Kettleman City, we arrived at UCSF Fresno with no issues. After the provided breakfast, Audrey Garcia-Lahrs gave the morning keynote. She received both an MS in Medical Sciences and an MPH in Environmental Health from Boston University in 2024 and is currently in the middle of her pre-med journey. She stood out as being youthful and humorous, two traits that no doubt serve her well in running her "medstagram" [@aud.in.med](https://www.instagram.com/aud.in.med), an Instagram page where she shares pre-med resources and personal anecdotes. I felt she was relatable to the younger generation which, considering the attendees were roughly 60% college students and 40% high school students, was a wise decision. Afterwards, there was a physician panel and then group breakout sessions with about a dozen physicians from various specialties. Even though I felt like they covered a wide selection of specialties, several ELM Club members didn't get to hear from someone working in the specific field they're interested in. During the lunch

period, attendees were given the chance to try hands-on activities like applying tourniquets, spinal boards, and sutures, as well as networking opportunities with various health programs at their booths. Finally, we ended with the closing keynote, which was the highlight of the trip for me. Dr. Michele DiTomas showcased a facility she directed in Vacaville, CA, which is dedicated to giving humane palliative and hospice care to elderly individuals serving life sentences. She made a point of how these people may have committed violent crimes decades ago, but they've had a lot of time to reflect while carrying out their sentences. She was full of compassion and resolve as she reiterated that these inmates are still human beings that deserve an end that is both peaceful and dignified, and as doctors and medical professionals, they have the responsibility to try and grant them that. It was a humbling and moving presentation, and I have no doubt that the pre-med attendees came away with a better understanding of the difference they can make in the lives of others.

We arrived back at AHC around 5:30 p.m. I am still impressed with how the ELM Club scouted out this professional development opportunity for themselves. Usually, it's us from the MESA/STEM team who identify opportunities for our students to take advantage of, but that was not the case here. It shows that the ELM club has more than a few highly driven individuals who take their career goals seriously. I would love to see more of our students advocate for themselves and discover unique/novel avenues for growth. If you are a STEM student looking into pre-med careers, I highly recommend that you get involved with ELM Club!



## While One Door Closes, The Other One Opens

by Jasmin Rodriguez, Biology, MESA Student

Life has given me many surprises and unexpected turns. If you had asked me a few years ago where I would be today, I would have never imagined myself in the position I am now. I am currently a second-year student at Allan Hancock College, majoring in biology, and working toward my dream and goal of becoming a pediatric doctor. Ever since I was little, I have had a passion for medicine and helping others. I also love learning about human biology and how our bodies function. I've been volunteering in the hospital for about 3 years now, and doing so has increased my interest higher in being part of the medical field.

As a first-generation college student and the oldest daughter, I have always tried to set an example for my younger siblings and make my parents proud by doing my best in school. I feel a strong sense of responsibility to succeed, not just for myself but for my family as well. With that, there also comes the constant thoughts of not being enough, not doing well enough, or feeling like I always must do more.

My original plan after high school was to go straight to a four-year university, graduate, and then attend medical school. But life gave me a different path after I didn't get accepted into my top schools, which was really discouraging at the time. I remember feeling disappointed and unsure of what to do next. This resulted in my decision to go to Hancock, and looking back now, it was one of the best decisions I could have made. It has honestly been a good two years at AHC so far, and I am glad I chose to stay. I was doubtful at first and questioned if I was making the right decision, but Hancock has given me all the support I need. The professors, resources, and environment have helped me stay on track and continue working toward my goals.

One of my biggest struggles has been with math. There were times when I felt really overwhelmed and doubted if I could succeed in my math classes. Math has challenged me in ways I didn't expect, and there were moments where I felt discouraged and frustrated with myself. However, I was not alone in that process. My professors played a huge role in helping me get through those challenges. They took the time to explain concepts, answer my questions, and encouraged me to not give up, even when I felt like I wasn't understanding the material. Because of their support, I was able to build more confidence in myself and improve my math skills over time. I spend hours in the library, math center, and study rooms practicing and going over what I learned in class. By not giving up and spending countless hours of studying I have ended up loving math, which is something crazy for me to say!

More importantly, my family has been my biggest source of strength. They have supported me through my hardest moments and continue to motivate me to keep going. Because of them, I remind myself why I started this journey in the first place.



Being part of STEM has taught me that the path to success is not always straight. Setbacks and challenges are part of the process, but they do not define our future. I have learned that setbacks do not define me, and that it's okay for plans to change. Today, I am more confident in my path and more determined than ever to achieve my goal of becoming a pediatric doctor. My journey may not have gone exactly as planned, but it has shaped me into a stronger and more motivated student. I am proud of how far I have come, and I am excited for what lies ahead.

# Welcome to the LVC Academic Success Center!

by Kyra Golike, STEM Learning Laboratory Coordinator

The MESA/STEM Academic Success Center is proud to announce its expansion onto Allan Hancock College's Lompoc Valley Center! It can be found in the LVC Academic Success Center (Building 2, Room 111), a new tutoring hub composed of the Math Center, MESA/STEM Academic Success Center, and Tutorial Center designed to support student success academically across all subjects. Stop by to receive peer drop-in tutoring support in chemistry, calculus, English, and more in a welcoming and collaborative environment! The LVC Academic Success Center also provides free printing, snacks, computer access, and study space to all registered AHC students.

By collaborating to provide these resources, the MESA/STEM Academic Success Center continues to support Allan Hancock College's commitment to student



success, equity, and access through

offering students a convenient, comprehensive hub for learning and growth at the Lompoc Valley Center.

Visit [www.hancockcollege.edu/lvc-tutoring/index.php](http://www.hancockcollege.edu/lvc-tutoring/index.php) to learn more!

Make sure to also keep an eye out for an invitation to the LVC Academic Success Center's Open House happening Fall 2026 where you and your fellow community members and AHC students, staff, and faculty can explore the LVC Academic Success Center while enjoying food and refreshments!



## Going Down My Own Path

by Erin Ramos, Animal Science, MESA Student

I consider myself a different person now from when I entered Hancock, and it's weird to write that sentiment when so many things are the same. The consistent things include confiding in my sister and twin, volunteering at the Santa Maria animal shelter (which you should consider!), and following lesbian feminism. I feel more certain in myself now, though. Not so much in my future prospects, but I don't envision it through darker lenses like I used to. I'm surrounded by lovely people from my biology classes, and they encourage me to want better for myself. I haven't considered a solid career path yet, but I know that I am enjoying exploring the field of animal science. Thanks to the encouragement from my parents and the people I have met here, I will be happy with where my trajectory takes me.

Being at Hancock has pushed me to consider the type of person I want to present myself as. I've always been scared to advocate for myself when it meant I would "rock the boat." Throughout the last few years, however, I realize that you don't have to do anything to upset others. If you look a certain way, talk a certain way, be anything against the flow of motion, people will still be against you. The



acknowledgement of being treated poorly is also seen as negative. Showing anger or being upset is “too much.” There were times I was met with ridicule when expressing my upset at situations occurring in local and global communities. People often find that getting upset to be an over-exaggeration, funny, or just pointless. I don’t agree with that. I don’t find anger to be violent, especially when it seems that it’s in response to systems that look down on you. The assumption that others think the same way we do because they choose nonchalance in response to issues going on, or they are quiet about how they feel, is not true. I don’t want to live that way anymore and find false solidarity with someone who finds humanity conditional. Pointing out that things are bad is not the cause of it. I feel different from when I entered Hancock because I am angrier, and I feel a larger part of myself has been realized. Someday, more people will be angry at how things are. Maybe then, when all the anger has been let loose and used, there won’t be much to be angry about.

## Check Out Your MESA/STEM Academic Success Center (M500)



### *Features include:*

**STEM Study Center** with student-use computers and project completion tools  
**STEM Learning Lab** including comprehensive STEM tutoring services and supplemental course material resources  
**STEM Collaborative Classroom** for small group study and instruction  
**STEM Student Decompression Lounge** when it is time to take a break  
**STEM Onsite Academic Counseling** available to meet the academic and career planning needs of STEM students at Allan Hancock College

## Spring 2026 MESA/STEM Academics Success Center Activities and Events

- Jan 20— UCSB-Smithsonian Scholars Program Drop-In Hours (11 a.m. - 1 p.m.; M-502)
- Jan 30— Financial Aid and Scholarship Workshop (1 - 2 p.m.; M-502)
- Feb 3— UCSB-Smithsonian Scholars Program Info Session + Q&A (12 - 1:30 p.m.; M-502)
- Feb 4— Connect with MESA/STEM Industry Coach (1:30 - 3 p.m. & 5:30 - 7 p.m.; M-502)
- Feb 6— Internships Opportunities & Strategies Workshop (1 - 2 p.m.; M-502)
- Feb 11— Connect with MESA/STEM Industry Coach (1:30 - 3 p.m. & 5:30 - 7 p.m.; M-502)
- Feb 17— UCSB-Smithsonian Scholars Program Drop-In Hours (12 - 1:30 p.m.; M-502)
- Feb 19— Connect with MESA/STEM Industry Coach (2 - 3:30 p.m. & 5:30 - 7 p.m.; M-502)
- Feb 20-21— CAMP (California Alliance for Maximizing Potential) Statewide Symposium in Irvine, CA (by invitation)
- Feb 25— Retirement Reception for Dorine Mathieu (2 - 3:30 p.m.; MESA Patio)
- Feb 28— MESA Day 2026 at UC Santa Barbara (to sign up as a volunteer)
- March 6— Recognizing and Managing Burnout Workshop (1 - 2 p.m.; M-502)
- March 7— Data Day @ UC Santa Barbara (sign-ups start early February)
- \*March 13— Resume Workshop (1 - 2 p.m.; M-502)
- March 17-18— UC Irvine & California Science Center Field Trip (sign-ups start late February)
- March 28— MESA/STEM Alumni Family Picnic (12:30 - 2:30 p.m.; SM Campus Commons)
- \*April 3— You’re Outta Here Workshop (11 a.m. - 12 p.m.; M-502)
- \*April 7— Resume Workshop (12:30 - 1:30 p.m.; M-502)
- April 10-12— 2026 MESA Student Leadership Retreat in Santa Cruz, CA (by invitation)
- \*April 17— You’re Outta Here Workshop (3 - 4 p.m.; M-502)
- \*April 22— You’re Outta Here Workshop (1 - 2 p.m.; M-502)
- May 8— MESA/STEM Student Achievement Celebration 2026 (4 - 6 p.m.; ARC Patio)

\*For students who are planning on transferring Fall 2026, don’t miss this workshop! Mandatory attendance of one Resume Workshop and one You’re Outta Here Workshop for MESA Fall 2026 transfer students.

Pre-recorded MESA/STEM Workshops are available on our website at

<https://www.hancockcollege.edu/mesa/mesasteminars.php>

## The Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement (MESA) Program

is an academic program that provides a wide range of support services and activities aimed at fostering student achievement and increasing the success and participation they experience while pursuing a degree in mathematics, engineering, computer science, biology, architecture, kinesiology, or other science-based programs. MESA enables students to prepare for and graduate from a four-year university with a math-based degree. It also seeks to increase the diverse pool of transfer-ready community college students who are prepared to excel as math, engineering and science majors. Through the program, students develop academic and leadership skills, increase educational performance, and gain confidence in their abilities to compete academically and professionally. Visit our website at [www.hancockcollege.edu/mesa](http://www.hancockcollege.edu/mesa).

